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Lectures on the Epistle to the Colossians

by

H. A. Ironside

The Church was passing through critical days when the Epistle to the Colossians was being written. Christianity seemed likely to be overwhelmed by a mixture of Jewish legalism, Grecian philosophy, and Oriental mysticism. But the Lord was watching over His own Truth; and to combat this Satan-inspired system that sought to rob the saints of the true Christ, the book of Colossians was written.

We are again passing through critical days. False cults put the true Christ of God at a distance and attempt to substitute an imaginary Christ — a Christ who is not an atoning Savior.

But God in His wisdom allowed this error and every other possible error to arise first in the early church so that they might all be exposed and the truth declared in His inspired Word. As a result, Satan has nothing new to offer. His "new" false cults are but old heresies revised — and all the Christian needs to protect himself against them is a clear understanding of God's Word.

In LECTURES ON THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS, Dr. Ironside carefully points out God's answer to doctrinal errors and shows how we as Christians can be occupied with the Head of the Church, and thus kept from all error and coldness of heart.

LECTURES
on
COLOSSIANS

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on the EPISTLE to the

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H. A. IRONSIDE

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PREFACE

Expositions of Colossians abound, many of them of great value, yet each generation seems to call for fresh and new applications of divine truth. Hence this volume.

These lectures have been delivered at many Bible Conferences throughout the United States and Canada, and are issued in book form in response to the earnest requests of many who heard them. If read with the open Bible beside them, and thus used not as a substitute for, but as an aid to, the study of the Word itself, it is hoped they may prove helpful to a wider circle of students of the Book of books.

The times are solemn. Old errors are being paraded in new terms, on all sides. Therefore the need of a new examination of this great Epistle which so effectively meets the philosophical, mystical, and legalistic speculations of carnal men. May God be pleased to bless these lectures to that end!

H. A. IRONSIDE

Oakland, California
December 12, 1928

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Part One

DOCTRINAL

Colossians 1:1—3:4

LECTURE 1

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Colossians 1:1–3:4

No one familiar with the Pauline Letters can fail to see how intimately linked are those to the Ephesians and the Colossians. It is very likely that the letter from Laodicea, referred to in the last chapter of the Epistle we are considering, is really our Epistle to the Ephesians, and therefore we can understand why the apostle was anxious that both should be read by the same people. My reasons for saying this will come out later. Some, in fact, who do not accept the inspiration of the New Testament have supposed that Colossians was a crude attempt to rewrite Ephesians from memory, but a careful examination of both letters shows that the one is the correlative of the other. Ephesians presents

the great truth revealed to Paul, and through him made known to all nations for the obedience of faith, and which he emphatically calls the mystery. It is the Church as the Body of Christ in its heavenly aspect, as 1 Corinthians reveals the Body in responsibility down here on the earth. Ephesians, of course, does not overlook the importance of our responsibility to walk according to the calling wherewith we are called, and to manifest the unity of the Spirit in our measure while still in this scene. Doctrinally, however, it is the Body as the aggregate of all believers from Pentecost to the Rapture, united to a risen Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit, that seems the theme of that Epistle. Colossians, on the other hand, has to do with Christ as the Head of the Body, and seeks to fix the hearts of the saints upon Him as risen and glorified, known no longer after the flesh but, in resurrection, the Head of a new order; and believers as responsible to manifest Him, to hold the Head, here in this world. So we might say the Headship of Christ is the theme of this Epistle. We need not therefore be surprised to find great similarity in Ephesians and Colossians, for so intimate is the link between Christ and the members of His Body that what is said of the one may often be said of the other, and it is given to the members of the Body to manifest the risen life of the Head. He it is with whom the Holy Spirit occupies us, in order that we may

be separated practically from all that would dishonor Him, and delivered from anything that would tend to keep Him at a distance.

At the beginning there was very real need for such ministry. Christianity as a divine system seemed likely to be overwhelmed (only that the Lord Himself was watching over His own truth) in the first centuries by a strange mixture of Jewish legality, Grecian philosophy and Oriental mysticism, so interwoven as to form several altogether new systems with which the name of Christ was linked in a most cunning way. The result was the "mystery of iniquity" referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2. These various systems were known under the general name of "Gnosticism." This, of course, in pretension, at least, was the very opposite to what Huxley, some years ago, designated "Agnosticism." The latter term means "without knowledge." The Agnostic says God is unknowable, the mystery of the universe is unsolvable. He says, There may or may not be a personal God back of this universe; matter may or may not be eternal; man may or may not survive death; I do not know; and he complacently takes it for granted that because he does not know, no one else does. He refuses the divine revelation given us in the Holy Scriptures and so is content to be an ignoramus (which is but the Latin equivalent for Agnostic), when he might have assured knowledge as one

taught of God. The Gnostic, on the other hand, says, I do know. *Gnosis,* from which the term is derived, simply means knowledge. *Epignosis,* used by the apostle for Christianity, is really super-knowledge. The Gnostic professed to have fuller knowledge of the mysteries of life and death and heavenly beings than the Bible itself reveals. He added to, or perverted the scriptural revelation, linking with it weird Persian dreams and human reasonings. He was neither a Jew, a Christian, a Philosopher, nor a Zoroastrian. He considered himself superior to them all, very much as the Theosophists do to-day, having taken what he thought to be the best out of all these systems and made a new system therewith. This weird imitation of the divine mysteries pretended to great depth of spirituality, to remarkable fulness of knowledge, to great profundity of thought. It was therefore most attractive to the natural mind, ever delighting in speculation on sacred themes, but it was Satanic in origin, and deliberately planned by the enemy to hide the glory shining in the face of Christ Jesus, concerning whom the Gnostics indulged in the wildest speculations. I have neither time nor space here to go into the weird speculations of Gnosticism with its amazing conception of grades of spirit-beings mediating between the uncreated God and His creatures. Those who are interested can readily find access to full explanations con-

cerning the Demiurge and the host of Kabbalistic Eons and inferior emanations supposedly coming in between the soul and God. The place that Christ Himself held in this system varied according to the vagaries of the respective teachers. Some thought that Jesus was but a man, and the Christ the divine Spirit which came to Him at His baptism and which left Him at the cross; so it could not be said Christ died, but simply Jesus died. You will recognize this as the root error of what is commonly called Christian Science and of most phases of the so-called "New Thought" of to-day. Others held that the body of Jesus was only spiritual, not material. They linked evil with matter and therefore refused to believe that "the Word became flesh." The first of these systems seems to be before the mind of the Apostle Paul in the writing of Colossians. The second is met by the Apostle John in his three Epistles. Both systems would rob the saints of the true Christ of God. They put Him afar off with many angels intervening who must first be invoked and placated before union with Christ can be known. Paul shows that we come to Him immediately, He being the one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. Again, these Gnostics placed varied ranks of principalities and powers, glorious spirit-beings, above and beyond Him, leading up to the invisible God, whereas the Apostle Paul shows us that He is

the Creator of all principalities and powers, and that they must all be subject to Him who is Himself the image of the invisible God.

I would not think it necessary to occupy people with these old errors were it not that the danger of losing sight of the Head is as real to-day as it was then. Every modern erroneous cult is just some old Satanic heresy revived, and each is designed to misrepresent some aspect of revealed truth in regard to Christ and His redemptive work. The advocates of these systems may profess great humility and preach and practise great self-abnegation, even to the neglecting of the body and its physical needs, but they all put Christ Jesus—the true Christ of God—at a distance, and an imaginary Christ, a Christ who is not an atoning Saviour, in His place. Some degree of familiarity with the ancient theories might save honest souls from being entangled in the meshes of these newer systems. Therefore the need, in every age, of reading this Colossian letter afresh in order that we ever may hold the Head.

It has been observed by others, but will bear repeating, that so intent is the Spirit upon glorifying Christ in this wonderful Epistle that He ever hides Himself. In Ephesians, where it is the truth of the one Body that is being unfolded, the Holy Spirit is mentioned many times, and we have clear teaching as to His personality and

operations. In Colossians He is never mentioned doctrinally, and only once incidentally, if I may so say where I recognize divine design throughout, and that is in verse 8 of chapter 1, where the writer speaks of having heard through Epaphras of the Colossians' "love in the Spirit." This is surely most significant; even the Holy Spirit Himself, eternally co-equal with the Father and Son, who all together constitute one God, would nevertheless hide Himself if men belittle or lose sight of the Lord Jesus as Head of the new creation. The blessed Paraclete speaks not from or of Himself but He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He would not even risk (to speak after the manner of men) being put in as one coming between the believer and Christ.

It may be well to point out that so far as we have any record Paul had never been to Colosse as a ministering servant, though Philemon, who was of that assembly, had been converted through him. But the saints in that city he had not seen in the flesh. Many individuals may have heard him during the time he was in Ephesus when "all in Asia" heard the Word, as related in Acts 19. By Asia here we are not to understand either the continent nor yet Asia Minor, but a much smaller district, ruled by a Roman proconsul, and therefore known as the "proconsular province of Asia." Thither Paul was at

one time forbidden to go. There he later labored with much blessing. There the seven Churches of the Apocalypse were afterwards located. Though Colosse was not one of these addressed by the Lord when He appeared to John in Patmos, yet it was situated very close to Laodicea, which with Colosse and Hierapolis formed a trio of cities in which were large Christian assemblies in early days.

Epaphras was the chosen instrument for the evangelization of Colosse. He evidently remained among the saints and cared for them as a godly pastor afterwards. But he found himself hard beset by emissaries of Satan, who were bent upon misleading these young believers, for their own selfish advantage. He therefore sought the help of Paul, the apostle, who was at this time a prisoner in Rome. It was in response to his plea that the letter was penned by divine inspiration, which is now before us.

Another subject which is full of interest is the fact that God in so many instances permitted error in doctrine or corruption in life, in the early churches, to be the means of adding to the volume of divine revelation and instruction.

It is a signal mercy that in His wisdom God allowed every possible form of error to arise in the apostolic era of the Church's history, in order that all might be exposed, and the truth declared through inspired men, that thus the faith in its

simplicity might be preserved for the generations to come. As a result of this, Satan has nothing new to offer. Old heresies are re-dressed and brought forward as new conceptions of truth from age to age, but in this respect, "there is nothing new under the sun." Therefore, all the Christian needs to protect him from modern systems of an evil character is a better acquaintance with the Word of God, where the truth is taught in its purity and the lies of the adversary are brought out into the light and fully exposed. No one familiar with the teaching of Colossians, for instance, will ever be misled by the specious sophistries of the various occult systems now being foisted on a credulous public, such as Theosophy or Spiritualism, nor will he be deluded by the revived Gnostic religions of Eddyism, Unity School of Christianity, or other branches of the misnamed New Thought.

In studying any book of the Bible it is well to have its outline clearly in mind. I submit the following synoptic analysis as a suggestive outline of the Epistle to the Colossians:

PART ONE: DOCTRINAL. Colossians 1:1–3:4.

Salutation, 1:1-2.
Introduction, 1:3-8.
Paul's Prayer and Thanksgiving, 1:9-14.
Twofold Headship of Christ, 1:15-19.
Twofold Reconciliation, 1:20-22.

Twofold Ministry of the Present Dispensation, 1:23-29.
Christ the True Wisdom—Revelation of the mystery of God, 2:1-7.
Christ the Antidote for Agnostic Philosophy, 2:8-10.
Christ the Antidote for Jewish Legality, 2:11-17.
Christ the Antidote for Gnostic Mysticism, 2:18-19.
Christ the Antidote for Carnal Asceticism, 2:20-23.
Christ the Believer's Life and Object, 3:1-4.

PART TWO: PRACTICAL. Colossians 3:5—4:18.

Practical Holiness by Conformity to Christ, 3:5-17.
Natural Relationships Sanctified, 3:18-4:1.
Concluding Exhortations, 4:2-6.
Salutations, 4:7-18.

This is, of course, in no sense arbitrary. Many other outlines have been suggested, and some of these may be much better than that which I have suggested. But it is along these lines that I purpose examining afresh this precious portion of the Word of God, which, like all Scripture, is written for our learning, and seems to have increasing value as new cults and false systems abound, all designed to make us lose sight of the Head and forget our union with Him in glory.

LECTURE 2

THE SALUTATION AND INTRODUCTION

Colossians 1:1-8

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:1-2).

Thirteen Epistles in the New Testament begin with the name Paul. A fourteenth letter, concerning the authorship of which there is considerable dispute, is nevertheless generally accepted as from the same pen, namely, the Epistle to the Hebrews. But the opening word of that Epistle is God. The thirteen beginning with the word Paul, are addressed either to churches among the Gentiles, or to individual believers, who were on full Church ground. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and as such he magnified his office. He was not the apostle to the Hebrews. If, therefore, he was the one chosen to write that wonderful opening up of the old and new covenants, as I firmly believe, it was quite in keeping with his Gentile apostleship that his name should be hidden. Christ alone was the Apostle and Prophet of the new covenant, as Moses and Aaron had been of the old, and so the opening word of Hebrews is simply *God,* but God speaking in His Son.

In this Colossian letter, as in the Philippian Epistle, Paul associated Timothy with him in the salutation. The bond between these two men of God, so far apart in age though they were, was a very real one. Timothy was converted during Paul's ministry at Lystra, and on his next visit to the same region the brethren took occasion heartily to commend this young man to him, as one in whom marked spiritual graces were manifest, and who gave evidence of considerable gift, and was therefore, in their judgment, suited to go out in the ministry of the Word. Acting on their advice, Paul took Timothy with him in the work after the elder brethren had solemnly laid their hands upon him, commending him to God for this special service. Throughout the years that followed, Timothy had proven himself in every respect reliable and devoted. His unselfish concern for the welfare of the people of God and his loyal attachment to his human leader endeared him very much to the venerable apostle. It would seem that Timothy had even accompanied Paul, or else followed him to Rome, and was either sharing his imprisonment, or within easy reach doing what he could to alleviate the suffering of the apostle, as well as ministering among the Roman believers. So he here connects the young preacher with himself when he sends his greetings to the saints at Colosse.

Paul attributed his own apostleship directly to

the will of God. It was He who had revealed Christ both to and in him, and set him apart for service, commissioning him to proclaim the unsearchable riches of grace among the Gentiles. It would be preposterous to suppose that the laying on of hands of the Church at Antioch, as mentioned in Acts 13, conferred any authority whatever upon either Barnabas or Paul, inasmuch as they had been approved laborers in the gospel for some time. It simply expressed, as in Timothy's case, the fellowship of the local assembly. It was the Holy Spirit who sent them forth and ordained them. Writing to the Galatians also, Paul uses similar expressions, and declares he is an apostle not of men nor by men. This is a principle of far-reaching importance in connection with the work of the ministry. Whenever men presume to add anything to the divine call or to confer authority on a servant of Christ, they are usurping the place of the Holy Spirit. The most that any "laying on of hands" can do is to express fellowship in the work.

In the second verse the Christians at Colosse are addressed as "the saints and faithful brethren." The first expression suggests the divine call; the second, the human response. It is God who designates His redeemed ones as saints, yet Romanists and many Protestants are generally astray as to the meaning of the term. With the first class, a saint is a particularly holy

person who displays great devotion or possesses miraculous powers, and is credited in the calendar of intermediaries with a superabundance of merit or goodness which may be appropriated by others. With many who profess greater enlightenment, a saint is one who has become victorious in the struggle with sin, and has been received triumphantly into Heaven. So they speak of the Christian dead as "sainted." But the scriptural conception is altogether different. The vilest sinner is constituted by God, a saint, the moment he puts his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, "who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification." Thus we are saints by calling and not primarily by practice. However, we should be careful not to divorce the practical side of things from the doctrinal. Being saints, we are now responsible to live in a saintly way. In other words, we are to live out practically what God has already declared to be true of us doctrinally. We do not become saints by the display of saintly virtues; but because we are saints we are to cultivate saintly characters. This, of course, is done in communion with God, in obedience to His Word, as we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The second expression, "faithful brethren," does not, I take it, imply any advance upon the first one, nor do the two terms indicate two classes of believers. "Faithful brethren" are

really brethren who believe; even as we read elsewhere, "They that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." It might be translated, either, "They that have faith are blessed with faithful Abraham," or, "They that believe are blessed with believing Abraham." There is an intentional connection between the two terms. All real Christians, therefore, are believing or faithful brethren. If any profess to be Christ's who do not believe His Word, they but show themselves to be unreal and false to their profession. For it is written, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." And again we are told, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed."

The usual apostolic salutation follows. "Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is God's free unmerited favor. It is even more than that. It is favor against merit. When we merit the very opposite God lavishes His loving-kindness upon us. That is grace; and what saint can but echo the words in the hymn,

> Since our souls have known His love,
> What mercies has He made us prove?

He who sits upon a throne of grace bids us come boldly to obtain grace and mercy as daily needs arise.

Peace is here, of course, the peace of God garrisoning His people's hearts in the day of evil. It is peace amid the most disquieting circumstances, because assured that "all things work together for good to them who love God, who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

We pass on, then, to the introduction:

> We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard (of it), and knew the grace of God in truth: as ye also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit (Colossians 1:3-8).

We are reminded of the introduction to the Epistle to the Ephesians as we read these words, which begin with an expression of thanksgiving to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This presents God in a double character as Creator and as Saviour. It is through Jesus Christ that our salvation is mediated. Having heard of the conversion of the Colossians, the apostle's heart was stirred to prayer on their behalf. He writes, "Praying always for you since we heard." For him to learn of others coming to Christ invariably meant that his burden of prayer was increased. He felt, as few men

ever have felt, the great need of intercession for the people of God, for he knew well the fearful opposition of Satan, the prince and god of this world, toward those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; and he realized the prevailing power of prayer to defeat the adversary. Therefore he bows in the presence of God in earnest supplication on behalf of those whom grace has saved, and he tells us farther on what it was for which he prayed; so we do not now linger on that.

It is interesting to notice how faith, love and hope are linked together here as in so many other places in Scripture. The order is different in 1 Corinthians 13. There, where he is exalting love, he puts faith first, hope second, and love last, as that which will abide when the other two have passed away. But here it is hope that closes that life which begins with faith, and the two are linked together by love. Faith lays hold of the cross. Hope looks on to the glory. Love is the power that constrains the saint in view of both.

It was a Divine Person to whom they had trusted their souls. People are troubled sometimes for fear their faith should not be of the right quality, or might prove of insufficient quantity to save them. But it is important to observe that it is not the character nor the amount of faith that saves. It is the Person in whom faith rests. The strongest faith in self-effort, or in the Church, or religious observances,

would leave the soul forever lost. But the feeblest faith in the Christ who died and rose again saves eternally. Some people try to make a Saviour of their faith, but Christ alone is the Saviour; and faith is but the hand that reaches out to Him.

Then he speaks of the love which they had to all the saints. This is precious indeed, and is the evidence both of the divine nature imparted in new birth and of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the very nature of the new-born soul to love not only God, but those who are begotten of Him. This love knows no sectarian limitation, but embraces all the people of God.

Hope looks on to the future; so he speaks of the hope which is laid up in Heaven, and of this they had learned in the word of the truth of the gospel. No one fully appreciates the gospel who leaves out the blessed hope of the Lord's return to receive His people to be with Himself in the Father's house. This is the glad consummation of the believer's life of faith and love and hope. Death is never set before the believer as his hope —but always it is the Lord's return for which he is to wait.

The gospel is God's good news about His Son, and therefore, when fully preached, necessarily includes the proclamation of His true sinless humanity, His Deity, His virgin birth, His vicarious sacrifice, His glorious resurrection, His present session as Advocate and High Priest at God's

right hand in Heaven, and His coming again to reign in power and righteousness when all His redeemed will be associated with Him. All these precious truths are included in the word of the truth of the gospel.

In verse six we learn that this gospel, even in Paul's day, had been carried to the very ends of the earth. The same message that had reached Colosse had been preached in all the world, as verse twenty-three also declares. And, wherever this great evangel of the cross had gone, it had produced fruit to the praise and glory of God in those who believed it. It is the height of folly to look for fruit before the soul has settled peace, or to expect evidence of salvation in the life before the gospel has been believed. Salvation is altogether of grace. Human effort has no place in it at all. Neither are we saved by the work of the Spirit within us producing that ninefold fruit mentioned in Galatians 5. We are saved by the work of Christ for us, a work done altogether outside of ourselves, and in which we had no part excepting to commit the sins that put the Saviour on the cross. The old colored man expressed it correctly when he said, "I did my part and God did His—I did the sinning, and God did the saving; I took to running away from Him as fast as my sins could carry me, and He took after me until He run me down!" Others might express it more elegantly, but no one could tell it more clearly.

The gospel is a message to be believed, not a collection of precepts or a code of laws to be obeyed. It is of faith that it might be by grace —"Not of works lest any man should boast." But the moment the message is believed it produces new life in the soul, and the Spirit seals the believer by coming to dwell within him. This invariably results in precious fruit for God. And this the Colossian believers had exemplified in their own experiences since they heard and knew the grace of God in truth. Observe that the italicized words, "of it," are better omitted.

It was not through the Apostle Paul that the message had been carried to Colosse, as we have already noticed. So far as we know he had never visited that city as a messenger of the cross. He speaks in this letter of those whose faces he had not seen in the flesh. It was another devoted man of God, Epaphras by name, who had proclaimed the gospel to them. Paul speaks of him affectionately as "our dear fellowservant," and he declares that he was a faithful minister of Christ. His outstanding characteristic, as gathered from Colossians 4:12, was that of fervency in prayer. How blessed when faithful preaching and fervent prayer go together! Alas, that they are so often divorced!

In verse 8, as we have seen, we get the only reference to the Holy Spirit that is found in this Epistle. It has already been remarked that when the truth as to Christ, the Head of the Church,

is being called in question, or when Satan is seeking to interpose anything between the soul and Christ, God will not even occupy the saints with the person or work of the Spirit, lest by occupation with subjective truth they lose sight of the great objective verities. So here the reference to the Spirit is only incidental. He simply mentions the fact that Epaphras had told them of their love in the Spirit. It was a precious testimony to the happy state of these dear young Christians, so recently brought out of Paganism with all its abominations. Now as a company set apart to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they were characterized by that love which the Spirit sheds abroad in the hearts of those who are born of God. This is all-important.

To pretend to great zeal for the truth of the one Body, while failing to manifest the love of the Spirit, is to put the emphasis in the wrong place. Doctrinal correctness will never atone for lack of brotherly love. It is far more to God who is Himself love, in His very nature, that His people walk in love one toward another, than that they contend valiantly for set forms of truth, however scriptural. "Truthing in love" (which would correctly convey the thought of Ephesians 4:15) is more than contending for formulas. It is the manifestation of the truth in a life of love to God and to those who are His, as well as for poor lost sinners for whom Christ died.

LECTURE 3

PAUL'S PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING

Colossians 1:9-14

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

This section reminds us of the prayers of the apostle for the Ephesians, as recorded in chapters 1 and 3 of that Epistle. There is something very precious and exceedingly instructive in being thus permitted to share the thoughts of, and notice the petitions offered up by the Apostle Paul for the Lord's people in various circumstances. His deep concern for their growth in grace, their enlightenment in divine things, their apprehension of the purpose of God, and the manifestation of spiritual power in the life—all these come out very strikingly as he bows his knees before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was not content to know people were justified and hence safe for eternity.

He was controlled by the earnest desire that each one should understand the hope of his calling, in order that the life and walk might be in harmony with it, and that they might remember they were here to represent Christ, their risen Head. These are what formed the burden of his prayers. It is questionable if any merely human writer has ever been able to give as helpful suggestions for our own prayer life as will come to us in our meditation upon these various petitions.

In verses 9-11 we have set forth certain blessings for which he prays. In verses 12-14 there are others for which he gives thanks. It is very important to distinguish these things; that is, to have clearly in mind the privileges and blessings which are non-forfeitable, because confirmed to us by God in Christ from the moment we believe on Him who died to make them good to us; and the additional blessings for which we need to pray daily, and concerning which there should be constant soul-exercise lest we fail to enter into and enjoy them. Many believers fail in not distinguishing the two classes of blessings. In certain circles almost every public prayer will be concluded somewhat as follows: "We pray Thee, forgive us our sins, and wash us in the blood of Jesus; receive us into Thy kingdom, give us Thy Holy Spirit, and save us at last for Christ's sake, Amen." Yet every petition in this prayer has already been granted to the believer

in Christ! God has forgiven us all trespasses. We are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. He has already translated us out of the kingdom of darkness into that of the Son of His love. He has sealed us with His Holy Spirit, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And we are saved eternally from the moment we believe the gospel. Therefore we might far rather cry exultantly in faith: "We thank Thee that Thou hast forgiven all our sins, and washed us from every stain in the blood of the Lamb. Thou hast brought us into Thy kingdom, given us Thy Holy Spirit, and saved us for eternity." Faith says "Amen" to what God has declared in His Word to be true. To go on praying for blessings that He tells us are already ours is the most subtle kind of unbelief, and robs us of the enjoyment that should be our portion if we but had faith to lay hold of the exceeding great and precious promises which are ours in Christ.

Let us then follow carefully the apostle's prayer, weighing every phrase and clause. He says, "I pray for you that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will." Those who were troubling the Colossian saints boasted of their superior knowledge. They had evolved a complex system of mystical and wholly imaginative teaching in regard to the soul's approach to God through an interminable number of intermediaries, coupled with ascetic regulations and legal

observances. In their eyes the gospel as preached by Paul was simplicity indeed; so much so that they looked upon it as a child's conception of the philosophy of the universe, which was puerile for men of mature minds. But he who knew this gospel in all its grandeur, as few other men have ever known it, speaks here of being "filled with the *knowledge* of God's will"; and he uses a superlative in the place of a word which the Gnostics were very fond of. They boasted of *"Gnosis"*—"knowledge." He says, *"Epignosis,"* meaning, literally, "super-knowledge." It is in the divine revelation alone that this is found. By this term, "the knowledge of His will," I do not understand him to be referring merely to God's will for the individual believer's life from day to day (though, indeed, that would be involved in the fuller thought of the will of God, as the drop of water is included in the ocean), but by His will, I take it, he means the wondrous plan or programme of the Father known from eternity and now being carried out in time to have its consummation in the ages to come—"The eternal purpose of God." Here is super-knowledge indeed! Here is that which the cleverest human intellect could never fathom, apart from divine revelation. And this revelation we have in our Bibles. It runs throughout the Scriptures from Genesis to the Apocalypse; furnishing a theme for devout contemplation, and demanding enthu-

siastic study and careful examination by men of the most erudite minds and brilliant intellects, and the deepest investigation of the most spiritual believers: but in which also the unlearned and the ignorant Christians will find constant enjoyment if they but allow themselves to be guided by the Spirit in searching the Scriptures to see whether these things are so.

So the words that follow stress the important fact that truth is not learned through the intellect alone. He prays that they may comprehend these things "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge aright, and is imparted by the Spirit, and He alone gives true understanding. Therefore, if we would learn the mind of God as revealed in His Word, there must be subjection of heart to the divine Teacher, and that self-judgment and self-distrust which leads one to walk softly before God; not in self-will or egotism, but in humility and lowly dependence on the One who inspired the Holy Scriptures, which alone can make wise the simple.

Then we learn in verse ten that if God opens up His truth to us it is not merely that we may delight in the wondrous things He has revealed, but it is His desire that we walk in the power of that which He makes known to us. So the prayer goes on, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." We can only walk

worthy of the Lord as we know His mind. The study of His Word and a godly walk should ever go together.

It is noteworthy that in Ephesians 4:1 we are exhorted to "walk worthy of our vocation," or calling, as members of the Body of Christ, while in Philippians 1:27 we are told to "walk worthy of the gospel," which we are left in the world to proclaim. Then in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 we are bidden to "walk worthy of God," Himself, who has called us to His kingdom and glory. Our walk is ever to be in accordance with the truth revealed to our souls. So here we are to walk worthy of the Lord, He who is the Head of the New Creation to which we now belong.

Dr. Griffith Thomas points out that the word here rendered *"pleasing"* is not found in any other passage in the New Testament, but is used in Greek elsewhere to mean "a preference of the will of others before our own." Bishop Handley Moule translated the phrase, "Unto every anticipation of His will."

This is blessed indeed, when the will of God is sweeter far than our own will, and we delight in doing as He would have us, not in order to propitiate His favor, but to give joy to His heart. Yet most of us learn so slowly that the only true happiness in life is to be found in doing the will of God. In vain we seek for satisfaction by trying to have our own way, until at

last like a bird, wearied out with flying against the bars of its cage, we fall back upon the will of God and learn that in it the mind and heart find perfect rest.

> Oh, the peace my Saviour gives;
> Peace I never knew before;
> And the way has brighter grown
> Since I've learned to trust Him more.

It is the subject believer who becomes fruitful, so he adds, "being fruitful in every good work." Or it might be better rendered, "bearing fruit in every good work." When we speak of every good work, we are not to think simply of preaching the gospel, teaching the Holy Scriptures, or engaging in what is sometimes called Christian activity or church work. We are very prone to do this and to distinguish between secular employment and sacred. But we need to be reminded over and over again that everything in a believer's life is sacred. The Church of Rome distinguishes seven sacraments. But every act of a Christian should have a sacramental character, using the word as generally understood. Whatever is right and proper for me to do in any circumstance, I should do with an eye single to the glory of God, and by so doing I shall be bearing fruit unto Him. The testimony of the little maid who said, "I know I am converted, and my mistress knows I am converted too, because I sweep under the mats now," has gone around the world,

and wherever this gospel is preached it is told for a memorial of her. She was right, for even in the most commonplace duties she was bearing fruit for God, and she sought to glorify Him by the faithful performance of her responsibilities, done not with eyeservice as a man-pleaser, but as pleasing "God which trieth the heart."

Then we have, "Increasing in the knowledge of God." This is more than the knowledge of the Word of God, though undoubtedly the one leads to the other, for God has made Himself known through His Word. But we increase in the knowledge of God as we walk with Him from day to day, learning more of His love and grace, His tender compassion, His care for those who trust Him; and proving, too, how solemn a thing it is to deviate from the path of obedience and thus be exposed to the rod of correction. We know God as we walk with Him. We walk with Him as we obey His Word.

> We know Him as we could not know
> Through Heaven's golden years;
> We there shall see His glorious face,
> On earth they saw His tears;
>
> The touch that heals the broken heart
> Is never felt above;
> His angels know His blessedness,
> His way-worn saints His love.

We shall thank Him for all eternity for every trial along our pilgrim path that gave Him a new

opportunity to display His grace and to manifest His heart to us, His needy people, so dependent upon His power and grace.

As we thus go on with Him, we will be strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, and this "unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." How much have we here upon which our souls may well meditate! It is He who supplies strength, giving all needed power in order that we may overcome in every adverse circumstance, according to the might of His glory. What room is there for discouragement, as temptations and trials surround me and seem about to overwhelm me, if I realize that the very same spiritual dynamic, that wondrous energy which raised Christ from the dead, operates in me by the Spirit, that I may be even more than victorious through Him who loves me!

But we might have supposed that all this manifestation of divine energy would result in producing some great outward display that would astonish and amaze an unbelieving world. But no, it is "unto all patience." I need this dynamic force so to keep the flesh in subjection that I can patiently endure whatever God in His wisdom sees fit to let me go through while in this wilderness world. Neither will I simply endure with stoical resignation, such as even a pagan philosopher might exhibit, but God would have me patiently wait upon Him and rest in His love

even amid circumstances that press hard upon my soul, with long-suffering, that is uncomplaining endurance. But there is even more than this. In the hour of trial a song of gladness will well up in the heart where the will of God is supreme. And so he adds, "With joyfulness." Here is something that the natural man knows nothing of—joy in the time of trial; gladness in the time of hardship; songs in the night, though the darkness be overwhelming; praises to the God of my salvation when nature shrinks and trembles. It was thus the martyrs could rejoice in the arena when thrown to the lions; or exult in the Lord when the flames leaped up around them as they suffered at the stake. And myriads of sufferers all through the Christian era have been able to testify to the sustaining grace of God, when the spirit seemed about to be overwhelmed. "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

The three verses that follow are in marked contrast to those we have just been considering. We have now thanksgiving instead of prayer. Here all is positive and eternally settled. The blessings enumerated are ours from the moment we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are absolutely non-forfeitable. To pray for these is to dishonor God by casting doubt upon His Word. Notice the three "haths" and the one "have" of the Authorized Version; words that speak of

present possession. Faith lays hold of such testimonies and rejoices in the assurance that these wondrous blessings are to be enjoyed even now.

First we read, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." This is true of every Christian, and there are no degrees in this divine fitness. We are made meet to be partakers of our glorious inheritance the instant we are cleansed from our sins and receive the new nature, which is imparted by a divine operation when we are born of God. How different are the thoughts of even some of the best of men! How often we hear it said of some devoted and aged believer, "He is fit for Heaven at last." But he was just as truly fit for Heaven the moment he received Christ as he is at the end of a long life of devoted service. Fitness does not depend upon experience. But in this connection it is well to remember that there is something more than the Father's house, the inheritance of the saints in light, before us. It is important that we should also have in mind the coming glorious kingdom. In 2 Peter 1:10 and 11 we are told, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The expression, "these

things," refers to the various Christian virtues enumerated in verses 5-7. It is through these things we are fitted for a place in the coming kingdom, but it is the justifying, regenerating grace of God that alone makes us meet for our heavenly inheritance. In other words, it is important that we distinguish between salvation by grace and reward for service.

We next read, "Who hath delivered us from the power [or, authority] of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." This is a different kingdom to that of which we have been reading in 2 Peter. It is the present sphere where Christ's authority is owned, the kingdom which we see and enter by new birth. This kingdom consists not of "meat and drink, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." As born of God we have lost our old standing as sons of fallen Adam in the Satanic kingdom of darkness. We have been brought out of the darkness into the marvelous light of children of God, and it is here, of course, that responsibility comes in to walk as children of light. J. N. Darby was once asked, "But suppose a Christian turned his back on the light; what then?" He replied, "Then the light will shine upon his back!" Most blessed it is to see this. We are in the light in all the value of the precious atoning blood of our Lord Jesus Christ sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, the very throne of

God from which the light shines.

Lastly we read, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." There is some question as to the MS. authority of the expression, "through His blood." The best editors generally omit it. It seems to have been inserted from Ephesians 1:7. But that does not for a moment touch the truth of which we have been speaking. It would only suggest the fuller character of redemption which is both by blood and by power. The blood having been shed, the omnipotent power of God makes redemption real to the believer, whose sins have all been forgiven and who has been lifted completely out of those circumstances in which he was once exposed to the judgment of God. As the soul meditates on the wonderful truths so succinctly presented in these three verses the heart will surely go out to God in worship and the life be yielded for devoted service!

Let me recapitulate, as I close:

He hath made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

He hath delivered us from the authority of darkness.

He hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

We have redemption through His blood.

Blessed certainties these that tell in unmistakable terms of our eternal security if once in Christ!

LECTURE 4

CHRIST THE FIRSTBORN

Twofold Headship of Christ and Twofold Reconciliation

Colossians 1:15-22

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is the Head of the Body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell (Colossians 1:15-19).

We have had our Lord Jesus before us as the Son of God's love in whom we have redemption. Our attention is now directed to Him as the One who has made God known to us. Coming into the world as man He is the image of the invisible God—that God who to the Gnostic could never be known or understood. We are told in John 1:18, "No man hath seen God at any time; the Only Begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Five times in the New Testament He is called the Only Begotten, and this endearing term always refers to what He is from eternity, with no thought of generation connected with it. It implies unity in

life and nature. Isaac is called, in Hebrews 11: 17, Abraham's only begotten son—yet Ishmael was also his son. But the link between Abraham and Isaac was of a unique character. And so, as the Only Begotten, our Lord is the unique Son, eternally that, for if He be not the Eternal Son then we lose the Eternal Father too. God existed from all eternity as three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but never became visible to created eyes whether of angels or men until the Holy Babe was born in Bethlehem. The Son was as truly the invisible God as the Father or the Spirit until the incarnation. Then He was seen of angels, and later on by men. As thus begotten of God of a virgin mother without any human father, He is Son of God in a new sense. And it is as such He is owned of the Father as the firstborn of every creature, or perhaps the expression would be better rendered, the firstborn of all creation. It is not that He is Himself created, but He is the Head of all that has been created.

It will be seen from what has been said above that the title "Firstborn" is not to be taken solely as a divine title, though He is divine who bears this name. But it is as Man He is owned of God the Father as the Firstborn. And how right it is that such a title should be conferred upon Him, for "by Him were all things created." Coming into the world as Man, He takes that place

in virtue of the dignity of His person. His is the glory of the Firstborn because He is the Creator. The firstborn is the heir and pre-eminent one. It is important to remember that in Scripture the firstborn is not necessarily the one born first. Many instances might be cited where the one born first was set to one side and the right of the firstborn given to another. One only needs to mention the cases of Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Reuben and Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, to which many more might be added. The first man is set aside and the second man is acknowledged as the firstborn. And so Adam and all his race are set to one side as unfit to retain authority over the world in order that Christ, the Second Man, the Lord from Heaven, may be acknowledged as the Firstborn.

It will be seen how tremendously all this would weigh against the Gnostic conception of a created Jesus to whom the Christ, a divine emanation, came, upon His enlightenment following His baptism, and who left Him again at the cross. It was the Eternal Son who stooped in grace to become the Son of God as born of a virgin. It should never be lost sight of that His Sonship is spoken of in these two distinct ways in Scripture. As the Eternal Son, pre-incarnate, He is called "the Son," "the Son of the Father," and also the "Son of God," but the latter term generally refers to what He became when He

took humanity into relation with Deity and became God and Man in one Person with two natures, in accordance with the word of the angel, addressed to His virgin mother, "That Holy One, who shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." It is necessary to be very accurate in our thinking when considering this great mystery, and not to let our thoughts run beyond Holy Scripture. It was of the virgin-born Saviour that Micah prophesied, saying, "But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," or, as the margin puts it, "from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2).

The five passages in which He is called the Only Begotten, if carefully weighed, will make this clear.

> The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory (the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth (Lit. Rend., John 1:14).
>
> No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, subsisting in the bosom of the Father, He hath told Him out (Lit. Rend., John 1:18).
>
> For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:15).
>
> He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9).

The five other passages referred to in which He is called the Firstborn, or First Begotten, are as follows:—

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature [or, of all creation] (Col. 1:15).

And He is the Head of the Body, the Church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence (Col. 1:18).

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29).

Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of [or, from among] the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5).

And when He bringeth the firstborn into the habitable earth, again He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him (Lit. Rend., Heb. 1:6).

It was He who brought all things into being. "Without Him was not anything made that was made." All the inhabitants of Heaven and of earth owe their life to Him. Beings visible or invisible are all the creatures of His hand. Angels, no matter how great their dignity, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all were created by Him and for His glory. The Gnostics placed these varied ranks of exalted beings between Him and God; but He is shown to be superior to them all, for He brought them into being. He is Himself the

uncreated Son who became Man to accomplish the work of redemption. Higher than all angels, He was made a little lower than they for the suffering of death.

In verse 17 His priority is insisted on in another way. "He is before all things." By the term "all things" we understand all that has been created, whether *personal* or *impersonal*. He Himself existed as the eternal Word before them all. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Full Deity is ascribed to Him, yet distinct personality. Moreover, it is He who sustains the universe, for "by Him all things consist," or, "hold together." It is His hand that holds the stars in their courses, directs the planets in their orbits, and controls the laws of the universe. How great is His dignity, and yet how low did He stoop for our salvation!

But He is firstborn in another sense in verse 18. Man rejected Him saying, "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him that the inheritance may be ours." So they slew Him, hanging Him on a tree. But it was then that God made His soul an offering for sin, and He accomplished the great work of redemption for which He came. "He died, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." But having been delivered on account of our offences, He was raised again on account of our justification. As brought

again from the dead He became the Firstborn in a new sense, the Head of the new creation. As Man on earth in incarnation there was no union with Him. Union is in resurrection. He was alone as the Incarnate Son here in the world; as He Himself says: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it shall bring forth much fruit." It is in resurrection that He is hailed as the Firstborn from among the dead. As such He becomes the Head of the Body, the Church; the Beginning of the creation of God; Firstborn among many brethren; the Resurrection King-Priest; the One who is yet to rule the world in manifested glory; the Melchizedek of the age to come, as Hebrews shows us.

Verse 19 is admittedly difficult to translate euphoniously, and in our English version the words "the Father" have been supplied in order to complete what seems like an incomplete sentence. But it should be carefully noted that there is nothing in the original to answer to the term "the Father." It is rather "the fulness" that was pleased to dwell in Jesus. And if this verse is connected with verse 9 of chapter 2 we shall understand at once what is in view. "In Him all the fulness (of the Godhead) was pleased to dwell." Deity has been fully manifested in Jesus our adorable Lord. This is the mystery of godliness of 1 Timothy 3:16. The Gnostics used this

term, "the fulness," or *"pleroma,"* for the divine essence, dwelling in unapproachable light; and in a lesser sense for the illumination that comes when one reaches the higher plane of knowledge. But all the divine *pleroma* dwelt in Jesus. All that God is, He is, so that we may now say, "We know God in knowing Him." He has fully manifested Him.

As we ponder the wondrous truths brought before us in these verses the spiritual mind will feel more and more that we have here mysteries of a character beyond the ability of the human mind to grasp. Here is truth for pious meditation, to stir the soul to worship and thanksgiving; not at all for the exercise of the intellect in theological speculations. As we read we would bow our hearts in lowly adoration and thus gaze upon the face of Him who has come forth from the glory that He had with the Father in all the past eternity in order to bring us into the knowledge of God.

In the next section we are told of a *Twofold Reconciliation.*

> And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight (Colossians 1:20-22).

In the portion we have just considered Christ has been presented as the Firstborn in two distinct ways. We have had His twofold Headship; first over all creation and then as Head of the Body, the Church. In the verses now before us we have reconciliation presented in a double aspect. First, we have the future reconciliation of all things, and then present individual reconciliation. He in whom all the fulness dwells has made peace through the blood of His cross. Man is never called upon in Scripture to make his own peace with God. He is viewed as alienated and an enemy; manifestly so, through wicked works. Sin has come in between God and man, requiring expiation ere the guilty rebel could be received by God in peace. Not only on earth, but in Heaven has sin lifted up its serpent-head. In fact it was in Heaven that sin began, when Lucifer apostatized, leading with him a vast number of the angelic hosts. Therefore the heavens themselves were unclean in the sight of God and had to be purified by a better sacrifice than those offered under the law. On the cross Christ tasted death, and so far-reaching are the results of His work that eventually all things in earth and in Heaven will be reconciled to God upon the basis of what He there accomplished. Whether for the universe or for the individual sinner, He made peace through the blood of His cross. Yet rebels remain in spite of the fact that peace has been made.

We may understand it if we remember that two nations which have been at war with one another may through their plenipotentiaries have agreed on terms of peace, and yet guerilla bands may insist on fighting, ignoring the peace that has been made. So men and demons still persist in refusing to own the divine authority, notwithstanding the fact that,

> Jesus' blood, through earth and skies,
> Mercy, free boundless mercy, cries.

For angels the terms of peace offer no pardon, but to the sinful sons of Adam clemency is extended, and he who will may trust in Christ and thus be reconciled to God. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

The reconciliation of all things includes two spheres, and two only. The time will come when all in earth and all in Heaven will be happily reconciled to God. When it is a question of subjugation, as in Phil. 2:10, there are three spheres. Heavenly, earthly, and infernal beings are at last to own the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is no hope held out in Scripture that the sad inhabitants of the infernal regions will ever be reconciled to God.

The reconciliation of verse 20 carries us on to the new Heaven and the new earth where righteousness will dwell, and the tabernacle of God

shall be with men, and all the redeemed with the elect angels abide with Him in holy harmony. Sin has ruptured the state of peace and harmony that once existed between God and His creatures. Christ in death has wrought reconciliation, and so made it possible for that lost concord to be re-established, but in new creation.

This reconciliation is already accomplished for individual sinners who "were sometime alienated and enemies in their mind by wicked works," but who through infinite grace have been reconciled to God by the death of His Son. It is the soul's apprehension by faith of the infinite love of the offended Deity manifested in the death of the cross, that destroys the enmity and draws out the affections of the renewed man to God revealed in Christ. Well may the apostle exclaim elsewhere, "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

It is not the holy, wondrous life of Christ that has thus reconciled us. It is His sacrificial death. And as a result of that death we shall eventually

be presented before God the Father unblameable in holiness and unreproveable in His sight. The sentence is not concluded in the 22nd verse, but the passage that follows introduces a new subject and therefore must be considered in a different connection.

In leaving the verses which we have been considering let us bear in mind the great outstanding truths that they would teach us. He who is the image of the invisible God has made peace for us by the blood of His cross. Now in resurrection He is our exalted Head, and we are the members of His Body. As Head, He is concerned about every redeemed one here on earth, who has thus, through grace, been united to Him. To own Him as Head is our first responsibility. We are to let nothing put Him at a distance or hinder our loyal subjection to Him through whom we have been reconciled to God.

LECTURE 5

PAUL'S TWOFOLD MINISTRY

Colossians 1:23-29

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body's sake, which is the Church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God (Colossians 1:23-25).

The "if" with which the 23rd verse begins has been the occasion of much perplexity to timid souls who hardly dare to accept the truth of the believer's eternal security, so conscious are they of their own weakness and insufficiency. But, rightly understood, there is nothing here to disturb any sincere believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a number of similar "ifs" in the New Testament, and all with precisely the same object in view—the testing of profession. In 1 Cor. 15:1-2 we read, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, *if* ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless

ye have believed in vain." Here the "if" is inserted in order to exercise the consciences of any who, having professed to believe the gospel, are in danger of forgetting the message, so proving that they have never really received the truth into their hearts. He would have them carefully examine their foundations. Many there are who readily profess to adopt Christianity and unite themselves outwardly with the people of God, who have never truly turned to the Lord in repentance and rested their souls upon His finished work. Such endure for a time, but soon forget the claims of the gospel when Satanic allurements would draw them away.

In Hebrews 3:6 we have another such "if." "But Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." The meaning is plain. It is not enough to profess to have the Christian hope. Those who are real will hold fast unto the end, as we also read in chapter 10:38-39 of the same Epistle. Endurance is the proof of reality. What God implants in the soul is lasting, and we may be assured that He who hath begun a good work in any one will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, the time when He shall come for His ransomed people, to complete in glory what His grace began on earth.

Paul did not pretend to say who of the Colossians were really born of God. While he had

confidence that most of them were, he wrote in such a way as to stir up the consciences of any who were becoming slack. A readiness to adopt new and fanciful systems was a cause for grave concern. Those who are really children of God, grounded and strengthened in the truth, are not of the number who will be moved away from the hope of the gospel. They know too well what it has already done for them, to lightly turn away from it to some new and untried theory.

This gospel they had heard, as in the providence of God it had been preached in all the creation under Heaven. This is probably a better translation than that of the Authorized Version. It is hardly thinkable that the apostle meant that every creature in the habitable earth had heard the gospel. But it is a wonderful testimony to the devotion of the early believers that even within one generation after our Lord's ascension the evangel had been carried throughout the known world. Of this gospel Paul was made "minister." The indefinite article does not really help; it only lends color to the idea which came in later, that the ministry is a special class to which all believers do not belong. The apostle is not claiming that he is a minister in the sense in which that term has been used in later years. He was one addicted to the work of the ministry. That is, the gospel had been committed to him

by God whom he served, as he says elsewhere, with his spirit in the gospel of His Son. This gospel ministry has been committed to all believers, and Paul is a sharer with others in making the testimony known. But in a preeminent way it was given to him to reveal it. As preached by Paul it bears the distinctive character of "the gospel of the glory."

Another ministry had also been given to him, even that of the assembly, the Body of Christ. So he goes on to say that he rejoices in whatever he might be called upon to suffer on behalf of the people of God, as in doing this he was filling up what was lacking of the afflictions of Christ in his own flesh. That is true of every real servant of God. To such an one the people of the Lord will ever be precious. And he will realize that in serving them and enduring trial on their behalf he is ministering in place of his absent Lord. Christ suffered once for all on the cross to put away sin. His faithful servants suffer in fellowship with Him for the perfecting of the saints, "for His Body's sake, which is the Church." The more devoted one is to Christ's interests down here, during His absence in Heaven, the more one will enter into this phase of suffering. It is godly shepherd-care that he has in mind; enduring affliction for the blessing of Christ's beautiful flock.

Of the Church Paul was made minister according to the dispensation of God given to him on our behalf to complete the divine testimony, or to fill up the Word of God. The whole counsel of God was not made known until Paul received this revelation of the mystery. This dispensation, or stewardship (for the two words are exactly the same in Greek), he unfolds more fully elsewhere; noticeably in the Epistle to the Ephesians which, as previously intimated, is the correlative to that to the Colossians. It was a special revelation given not to the twelve, but to him as the apostle of the new dispensation. He goes on with this theme in the verses that follow.

> Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily (Colossians 1:26-29).

It is important to remember that the mysteries of the New Testament are not necessarily things mysterious or abtruse. They are rather sacred secrets made known to the initiated.*

*A fuller discussion of this interesting subject appears in the author's handbook entitled, "The Mysteries of God." now out of print.

These divine secrets could never have been discovered by human reason, nor even by the child of God unless a special revelation had been given. The Gnostics made much of the mysteries of their systems. The Christian mysteries are in vivid contrast to these dreams of insubject men.

The mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ was never made known in Old Testament times, nor yet in the days when our Lord was on the earth. We are told distinctly it had been "hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to the saints." The divine method of making it known was by a special revelation to the Apostle Paul, as he tells us in Ephesians 3. But this revelation was not for him only. It was a ministry committed to him to pass on to the saints, "To whom God did make known the wealth of the splendor of this sacred secret among the nations, which is Christ among the Gentiles, the hope of glory." The Old Testament Scriptures clearly predicted the calling of the Gentiles, but always in subjection to Israel. During the present dispensation Israel, as we read in Romans 11, is set aside because of unbelief, and Christ is working among the nations, attracting weary hearts to Himself altogether apart from any thought of Jewish priority. Believing Jews and Gentiles are united by the Holy Spirit's baptism into the one Body, and thus all fleshly distinc-

tions are done away. The middle wall of partion is broken down. This *is* the mystery.

Christ Himself, the Head of this Body, is the apostle's theme. Note his words, "whom we preach." To substitute *what* for *whom* we preach is a serious mistake. Christianity is centered in a Person, and no one preaches the gospel who does not preach Christ. When there is faith in Him the Spirit unites the believer to Him.

How earnest was the apostle in seeking to lead Christians into the knowledge of this precious truth, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom." His was the true pastor's heart, and he combined in a marvelous way the teacher's gift with this. The subject of his ministry was the perfecting of the saints, as he says elsewhere. He would present every man complete or full grown in Christ Jesus. To this end he earnestly labored according to that divine energy which wrought so powerfully in him for the salvation of souls and the upbuilding of the people of God.

False teachers would turn the eyes of the saints away from Christ, the glorified Head of the Body, in order that they might occupy them with specious systems of Satanic origin, and thus draw away disciples after themselves, as Paul had warned the Ephesian elders. But all true Spirit-given ministry is Christo-centric. Every faithful minister of the new dispensation would

lift up the Lord Jesus before the admiring gaze of His people so that, occupied with Him, they might be transfigured into His likeness. Like John the Baptist he will say, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

No man really preaches the whole truth to-day who does not enter into the twofold ministry of this section of Colossians—the gospel and the Church. The former is proclaimed to sinners and is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes. The latter is taught to saints and builds them up in the faith as to their present privileges, and corresponding responsibilities. I am called upon, not only to win sinners to Christ that they may be saved from impending wrath, but I am to seek to make "good churchmen" out of those already saved. This is not to insist on what is called denominational loyalty, nor to endeavor to sectionalize the saints and bring them into bondage to legal principles and practices for which there is no biblical warrant, but it is to show them their position as in the new creation, linked with their risen, glorified Head, and to lead them into the recognition of the unity of the Body, in which all believers have a part; that thus they may endeavor to keep the unity formed by the Holy Spirit, as they walk together in the uniting bond of peace.

Sad indeed is it when this very truth becomes a means of dividing those of like precious faith,

when perverted by men of sectarian spirit and narrow cramped sympathies who are more concerned about building up local "causes" than edifying the Body of Christ!

That saints are not to neglect local responsibilities, out of which grows the relationship of church to church, is perfectly true. But it is not a unity or confederacy of assemblies that is denominated "the unity of the Spirit." It is rather that abiding unity which the Holy Ghost has formed by baptizing believers into one Body. If I set at nought any fellow-believer I am to that extent failing to keep this unity. As members one of another, having the same care one for the other, we show in a practical way the truth that we are one in Christ.

LECTURE 6

CHRIST THE TRUE WISDOM

THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Colossians 2:1-7

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ: in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Men who know little of the deep convictions that stirred the heart of the Apostle Paul will have difficulty in realizing the intensity of his feelings when the truth of God was called in question, and the people of the Lord were in danger of being corrupted by false doctrine and turned aside from the simplicity that is in Christ. He says, "For I would have you know what intense agony I have for you." He was not one who could play fast and loose with revealed truth.

His very soul was tortured when Christ was dishonored by those who professed His Name. He was not a self-complacent liberal in theology carelessly tolerant of any teaching, no matter how pernicious, so long as outward unity is maintained. To know that both at Colosse and Laodicea designing men were seeking to seduce the saints from their first love, who was Christ Himself, caused him intense concern. That the enemy was largely successful at Laodicea we know; for John, as the amanuensis of the glorified Son of Man, writing to them later from Patmos, charges them with being neither cold nor hot. Proud of their culture and wealth they were indifferent to Christ. It is from this Paul sought to save them, and it is to be hoped he succeeded at Colosse.

The truth unites. Error divides. He desires "that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, even Christ" (verse 2). There is some MS. diversity in regard to the last part of this sentence. The Authorized Version reads, "The mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," which is admittedly peculiar. One could understand, "The mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Christ," and it might be so translated; but the reading of some MSS., "The mystery of God, even Christ," seems clearer, and is probably correct. It is the

great divine mystery of the new man, as we read in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The definite article before "Christ" does not appear in the Authorized Version, but probably should be there. It is the mystical Christ that is in view, and I take it that we have a similar idea in Colossians 2:2. The mystery of God is that which He has now revealed regarding Christ as Head of the Body, and consequently of the entire new creation. As believers enter into the truth of this they are delivered not only from vain speculations but from fleshly strivings, for all perfection is found in Christ. So the apostle would have them understand the wealth of this great mystery as they enjoy the full assurance of understanding in their hearts' acknowledgment. In Hebrews 6:11 we read of the full assurance of hope, and in 10:22 of the same Epistle we get the full assurance of faith. These together establish the soul and set it free from doubt and fear.

In Christ, or if you prefer, in this mystery of God now revealed, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is not necessary to

go elsewhere, investigating human systems and philosophies, for an explanation of the mystery of the universe and the relations of the Creator to His creatures. All these are fully told out in Christ. As we learn to know Him better and apprehend the truth concerning Him, every question is answered, every perplexity made clear, and every doubt dissolved. Why turn aside to idle speculations, no matter how pretentious, when God has spoken in His Son and given His Holy Word to lead us by the Spirit into all truth? Paul says all this in order to protect the saints from being led astray by persuasive talk, or with enticing words. Advocates of error delight to clothe their evil systems in most attractive phraseology, to entrap the souls of the unwary. Only the truth of God can preserve from such. It is important to remember that no amount of intellectual culture or human learning can take the place of divine revelation. If God has not spoken we may speculate and reason as we please. But if He has given the truth in His Word there is an end to all our theorizings.

In this chapter he shows us how Christ is the antidote for human philosophy, Jewish legality, Oriental mysticism, and carnal asceticism. These have no place in Christianity. Christ supersedes them all. And Paul knew through the testimony of Epaphras what Christ had meant to these Colossian saints from the time of their conver-

sion, and he was very jealous lest they should now be turned aside. Though not with them in the flesh, he was one with them in spirit, and rejoiced in all he had heard of their godly order and their steadfast confidence in Christ. This was how they began; moreover they had continued in the same paths and he would have them continue so. Having received Christ Jesus the Lord, that is, having trusted Him as Saviour and owned Him as Master, he would now have them walk in Him, not turning aside to any new system or perversion of the truth. He desired to see them rooted and built up in Him; rooted like a tree, sending its roots deep down into the soil; he would have all their hidden sources of supply so centered in Christ. Built up like a building founded on a rock and firmly established; he would so have them recognize Christ as their only foundation. He uses the same double figure in Ephesians 3:7, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love." God is love, and God has been revealed in Christ; so to be rooted and established in love is to be rooted in and founded upon God, and it is God revealed in Christ. Why then should any go after speculative theories that cannot give the soul peace and which make light of Christ the Head? As thus walking in Him the man would be established in the faith, in accordance with the instruction already received, "abounding

therein with thanksgiving." Nothing so causes the soul to overflow with worship and gratitude to God as a deep knowledge of Christ. It is noteworthy that true joy is only found in acquaintance with Him.

It is hardly necessary to make the application to present-day systems. Each one who really knows Christ will readily do that for himself or herself. An illustration may help to make clear what I believe the apostle is here indicating: A follower of Mrs. Eddy, the now-deceased head of the so-called Christian Science cult, labored long to unfold the professed benefits and beauties of that system to a simple Christian woman who, after listening for several hours, found herself utterly unable to follow the specious sophistries and vapid theorizings of her visitor. Finally she exclaimed, "I do not understand what you are getting at. Can you not put it all in simpler terms so that I may know what it is you want me to believe?" "Well," replied the other, "in the first place you must get hold of this: God is principle not a person. You see, my dear, we worship a principle–" "Enough," exclaimed the other with a relieved expression on her countenance; "that would never do for me! I worship a personal God revealed in Christ, my blessed, adorable Saviour." And at once her soul was delivered from the net spread before her by the soft-voiced emissary of Satan who had been endeavor-

ing to ensnare her. And this is ever the test. Every system that makes light of Christ or His atoning blood is from the pit, and to be shunned as a viper by all who know Him.

John Newton has well written:

"What think ye of Christ?" is the test,
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of Him:
As Jesus appears in your view—
As He is beloved or not,
So God is disposed to you,
And mercy or wrath is your lot.

Some take Him a creature to be—
A man, or an angel at most;
But they have not feelings like me,
Nor know themselves wretched and lost.
So guilty, so helpless am I,
I durst not confide in His blood,
Nor on His protection rely,
Unless I were sure He is God.

Some call Him a Saviour, in word,
But mix their own works with His plan;
And hope He His help will afford,
When they have done all that they can:
If doings prove rather too light
(A little they own they may fail),
They purpose to make up full weight,
By casting His name in the scale.

Some style Him "the Pearl of great price,"
And say, He's the fountain of joys;

Yet feed upon folly and vice,
And cleave to the world and its toys.

Like Judas, the Saviour they kiss,
And while they salute Him, betray:
Oh! what will profession like this
Avail in His terrible day?

If asked what of Jesus *I* think,
Though still my best thoughts are but poor,
I say, He's my meat and my drink,
My life, and my strength, and my store;
My Shepherd, my trust, and my Friend,
My Saviour from sin and from thrall;
My Hope from beginning to end,
My Portion, my Lord and my All.

The natural man cannot understand why Christians should insist upon a clear-cut confession of the truth as to Christ. What matters it, he will ask, whether Jesus be a mere man, spiritual beyond most, or be in very deed the Divine Eternal Son become flesh? If a man only, He is still the great Exemplar and the Master-Teacher. If more than man He is but the manifestation of the Father, and by His life of love and purity has shown us God's attitude toward all mankind and so leads us into a better understanding of God and our relationship to Him.

But this is not the truth of Holy Scripture concerning Him. His holy life—whether He be only human or divinely-human—can never put away our sins or fit us to stand uncondemned before

the eternal throne. He had to be both God and Man in order that He might make atonement for sin, meeting as Man—yet Man in all perfection —every claim that the throne of outraged Deity had against man. Touch the Person of Christ and you touch His work. If that work was not divinely perfect there remains no other sacrifice for sins and so we are left without a Saviour.

But, blessed be God, He who came forth from the Father has glorified Him on the earth, and having finished the work given Him to do, has gone back to that glory that He had with the Father before the world was. There He sits, the exalted Man who made purification for sins, on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, ever living to make intercession for those His grace has saved. Happy in this knowledge we may well sing, with chastened joy,

> Head of the Church! Thou sittest there,
> Thy members all the blessings share—
> Thy blessing, Lord, is ours:
> Our life Thou art—Thy grace sustains,
> Thy strength in us each vict'ry gains
> O'er sin and Satan's pow'rs.

May we prove our loyalty to Him, not only by confessing a true Christ with our lips, but by giving Him the supreme place in our lives!

LECTURE 7

CHRIST THE ANTIDOTE TO HUMAN PHILOSOPHY

Colossians 2:8-10

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power.

Scripture nowhere condemns the acquisition of knowledge. It is the wisdom of this world, not its knowledge, that is foolishness with God. Philosophy is but worldly wisdom. It is the effort of the human mind to solve the mystery of the universe. It is not an exact science, for the philosophers have never been able to come to any satisfactory conclusion as to either the "why" or the "wherefore" of things. "The Greeks seek after wisdom," we are told; and it was they who led the way for all future generations in philosophical theorizing. Before a divine revelation came it was quite natural and proper that man should seek by wisdom to solve the riddles that nature was constantly propounding, but now that God has spoken this is no longer necessary, and it may become grave infidelity. From Plato to Kant, and from Kant to the last of the moderns,

one system has overturned another, so that the history of philosophy is a story of contradictory, discarded hypotheses. This is not to say that the philosophers were or are dishonest men, but it is to say that many of them have failed to avail themselves of that which would unravel every knot and solve every problem, namely, the revelation of God in Christ as given in the Holy Scriptures.

Plato yearned for a divine Word—"logos"—which would come with authority and make everything plain. That Word is Christ of whom John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And again, "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word is no longer hidden. We do not need to search for it. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Socrates pondering the, to him, unsolvable problems relating to possible future rewards and punishments, said, "It may be, Plato, that the Deity can forgive sins, but I do not see how." No such perplexities need trouble any honest mind now, for what philosophy could not explain, the gospel has made clear, that gospel in

which is revealed the righteousness of God for sinful men. Apart from this divine revelation the wisest philosopher of the Twentieth Century knows no more in regard to the origin and destiny of man than the Attic philosophers of so long ago.

Two great systems were still contending for the mastery over the minds of men in the Western world when Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians—Stoicism and Epicureanism. The one said: Live nobly and death cannot matter. Hold appetite in check. Become indifferent to changing conditions. Be not uplifted by good fortune nor cast down by adversity. The man is more than circumstances, the soul is greater than the universe. Epicureanism said: All is uncertain. We know not whence we came; we know not whither we go; we only know that after a brief life we disappear from this scene, and it is vain to deny ourselves any present joy in view of possible future ill. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." To many of the former class the Christian message appealed, and one has only to read 1 Corinthians 9:24-29 or Philippians 4:11-13 to see how readily Paul's message would lay hold of an honest Stoic. With Epicureanism Christianity had nothing in common. But while the Stoic might find in Christianity the fulfilment of his heart's yearning, there was not in his philosophy anything the Christian needed, for everything that was best in that system he already

had in Christ. Besides these two great outstanding philosophical schools there were many lesser systems among both the Greeks and Romans, all of them seeking to draw away disciples to themselves. The Gnostics embodied parts of all the different schools of thought in their new system. From the weird guesses embodied in the Pythagorean fables down to the evolutionary theories of the present time the Church of God is still in conflict with these vagrant philosophies.

Against all such the Christian is warned. "Beware lest any man spoil you" (that is, lest any make a prey of you) "through philosophy and vain deceit." These may make a great show of learning and their adherents may look down with contempt from their heights of fancied superiority upon people simple enough to believe the gospel and to accept the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of the living God. But with all their pretentiousness they are simply the traditions of man, the rudiments or elements of the world. The apostle thus expresses his contempt for mere reasoning in comparison with divine revelation. These systems that claim so much were after all but elementary; it was the ABC of the world offered to those who were in the school of Christ and had left the kindergarten of human tradition far behind. "Can a man by searching find out God?" Impossible. But God is already known in His Son.

It is most important that Christians should see this, particularly the young men who are called of God to be ministers of His Word. It is a sad commentary on conditions in Christendom that in the average theological seminary far more time is given to the study of philosophy than to searching the Scriptures. A minister of an orthodox church said recently, "I could have graduated with honors from my seminary without ever opening the English Bible." Thank God, this is not true of all such training schools; but it is true of perhaps the majority; and the result is we have to-day thousands of professed ministers of Christ, many of them unconverted, and others who, though children of God, have been so stunted and hindered by their philosophical education that they are utterly unable to open up the Scriptures to others, for they are so ignorant of the Word themselves. Christianity owes no debt to Greek, Roman, Medieval, or Modern philosophy. It is like the Bible itself in this—

> A glory gilds the sacred page;
> Majestic, like the sun,
> It sheds a light on every age,
> It gives, but borrows none.

A man can be a well furnished minister of Jesus Christ who has never heard the names of the great philosophers, whether pagan or Christian, and who is utterly ignorant of their

systems and hypotheses, providing he will "study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The truest culture, intellectual or spiritual, is that which is drawn from the constant study of the Bible. How often as one comes in contact with men of most gracious personality, gentlemanly appearance, high spirituality, and well-trained intellect he finds upon inquiry that they are like John Wesley, "men of one book," and in some instances, hardly conversant with the literature of earth. And in saying this I do not mean to put a premium on ignorance, for as mentioned in the beginning of this address, the knowledge of this world is not under the ban. The Christian may well avail himself of any legitimate means of becoming better acquainted with the great facts of history, the findings of science, and the beauties of general literature; but let him never put human philosophy in the place of divine revelation. If he studies it at all, and there is no reason why he should not do so, let him begin with this—God has spoken in His Son and in the Holy Scriptures He has given us the last words upon every question that philosophy raises. Browning was right when he wrote:

> I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ,
> Accepted by the reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it,
> And has so far advanced thee to be wise.

When the Saviour revealed Himself to the Samaritan woman she found her every question answered as she gazed upon His face.

"In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." We have already seen in a previous lecture that this word fulness, *pleroma,* was a favorite term of the Gnostics. It represented to them the sum of the qualities of Deity, and with them Christ was but one of many stepping-stones or intermediaries leading up to the *pleroma,* but here we learn that not only are all the attributes of God seen in Christ, as Arius afterwards thought, and as Theistic philosophers everywhere admit, but the very essence of the nature of God in all its entirety dwells in Him.

All that God is, is fully told out in Christ. He could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." So that we may say without hesitation, if any ask as to the character of God, that *God is exactly like Jesus.* Jesus is the Christ, and in Christ all the fulness of Deity dwells in a body, so that when at last we come into the presence of the Father we shall find in Him one known and loved before, not a stranger still unknown and possibly unknowable. J. N. Darby was thinking of this when he wrote:

> There no stranger-God shall meet thee!
> Stranger thou in courts above:
> He who to His rest shall greet thee,
> Greets thee with a well-known love.

"Confessedly great is the mystery of piety, He who hath been manifested in flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, proclaimed unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). God is revealed, He is no longer hidden. All His glory shines in the face of Christ Jesus. This solves at once for me as a believer the mystery of the universe.

> And that which seemed to me before
> One wild, confused Babel,
> Is now a fire-tongued Pentecost
> Proclaiming Christ is able;
> And all creation its evangel
> Utters forth abroad
> Into mine ears since once I know
> My Saviour Christ is God.

In the 10th verse we are told, "And ye are complete in Him which is the Head of all principality and power." The word "complete" is literally "filled full." In Christ dwells all the *pleroma* of Deity, and we have our *pleroma* in Him. We do not need to go elsewhere for illumination or information. "And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:16-18). This revelation floods our being with rapture, fills our cup of joy, and satis-

fies every demand of the intellect. We are filled full in Him. I would suggest that it is not the believers' standing exactly that is in view here. We have that in Ephesians 1:6. There we are told we are "accepted in the Beloved." In that sense we may be said, of course, to be complete in Him; but Colossians 2:10 is rather our state; it is the state of those who have found every need met in Christ, who is the Head of all principality and power.

It has already been pointed out that "principalities" and "powers" are terms relating to different ranks of spiritual beings. In a pretended knowledge of the nature and office of these glorious intelligences, the Gnostics reveled, and placed them high above Christ Himself who was, according to them, but one who introduced the initiate into the fellowship of this great serried host leading on up to the invisible God. But the truth is the very opposite, for all the principalities and powers (and these may be good or evil, fallen or unfallen) were created by Him and for Him in whom all the fulness dwells, and He is the Head of all angelic companies as well as human beings.

> No place too high for Him is found,
> No place too high in Heaven.

God would have His people ever realize that He who stooped to the depths of shame and suffering of the cross for their salvation is as to the

mystery of His wondrous Person, God over all, blessed for ever.

It will be observed that the 10th verse does not complete the sentence, which is carried right on in verses 11 and 12, but as what follows is intimately linked with the next subject for our consideration, I leave them now to take them up in the next address, only observing that it is immediately after the declaration of Christ's Headship over all angels that we are told of the depths of His humiliation; for God would never separate the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. But He would have us remember that it was because of His transcendent character and His true Deity that He could undertake the work of purging our sins when He gave Himself a sacrifice on our behalf. He had to be who He was in order to do what He did. The settlement of the sin question could never be effected by a created being. The issues were too great. Of all men it is written, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of the soul costs too much. Therefore, let it alone for ever." This is a somewhat free translation, but authorized by the best Hebrew scholars. It emphasizes what is here brought before us. Low thoughts of Christ result from low thoughts of sin. When I realize the enormity of my iniquity I know that only the Daysman for whom Job yearned can

save me from such a load of guilt. He, because He is God and Man, can "lay His hand upon us both," and thus by making atonement for sin bring God and man together in holy, happy harmony.

> . . . . Can a mere man do this?
> Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do.
> Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,
> Or lost!
>
> —Browning

And so we may conclude with this tremendous truth: God has no other answer to all the questionings of the mind of man as to spiritual verities than Christ; and no other is needed, for Christ is the answer to them all. He who refuses Christ refuses God's last word to mankind. He has said everything He has to say in sending Him into the world as the Giver of life and the propitiation for our sins. To turn from Him is to refuse the living incarnation of the Truth and to shut oneself up to error and delusion.

LECTURE 8

CHRIST THE ANTIDOTE TO JEWISH LEGALITY

Colossians 2:11-17

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of [the sins of] the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

This somewhat lengthy section, beginning (as previously mentioned) in the middle of a sentence, might be more easily expounded if divided into two parts, but it is so intimately linked together that I am taking it up as a whole. Philosophy, as we have observed, is the working of the human mind independently of divine revelation. Legality is the endeavor to use a divinely given code, to which may be added precepts of men, as

a means either of salvation in the first instance or of growth in grace afterwards. Neither of these conceptions is in accordance with Scripture. "By the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight;" this forever bars out legal works as a procuring cause of salvation. "Ye are not under law but under grace;" this, as effectually, forbids the thought that holiness of life for the Christian is found in subjecting himself to legal principles. "The law is the strength of sin," we are told in 1 Corinthians 15:56. It is not, as multitudes have supposed, the strength of holiness or the power for righteousness. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit, who occupies us with Christ crucified, raised, and glorified, that is the dynamic of spirituality.

Gnosticism was as much indebted to Judaism, which it perverted to its own ends, and to a weird Jewish Kabbalism, as it was to the vapid reasonings of Gentile philosophers and, as we shall see later, to Mithraic and Zoroastrian mysticism. Here the apostle specifically deals with Jewish legality, and shows how Christians have been forever delivered from the law and the legal principle in its entirety, but are now linked with the risen Christ. For the believer to go back to the law for his perfecting in holiness is, as he shows in the Epistle to the Galatians, to fall from grace. That is, it is the virtual setting aside of the gospel of grace; forgetting that having be-

gun in the Spirit we are not to be made perfect by the flesh. There were those ever dogging the footsteps of the great apostle to the Gentiles who sought to pervert his converts by teaching them, "Except ye be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, ye cannot be saved." While the council at Jerusalem gave forth no uncertain sound in opposition to this it is evident that its decisions were by no means everywhere accepted. It was hard for converts from Judaism to realize their complete deliverance both from the law of Moses as a rule of life, and from the ceremonies and ritual of that law as a means of growth in grace. Here the question at issue is handled in a remarkable manner through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Having declared that we have our completeness in Christ, our exalted Head, he continues: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." I omit the words "of the sins" as being without sufficient MS. authority. It is not merely a question of sins here, but the flesh itself that is in view. Circumcision was the cutting off of the flesh physically, and it was given by God to picture the judgment of the carnal nature and its complete setting aside. This is what God has done in the cross of Christ. In His cutting off by death when He stood vicariously in our place, we see the end of the flesh as viewed from the

divine standpoint. It is cut off, put to one side, as absolutely worthless. "The flesh," we read, "profiteth nothing." "It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Therefore God is making no attempt to improve it; consequently, there is no place for merit so far as man is concerned. He has none, and, blessed be God, he needs none. All merit is in Another!

The same truth is set forth in Christian baptism. Personally, I have no sympathy with those who in our day would seek to do away altogether with water baptism on the plea that there is now, since the full truth of the Church is revealed, only one baptism, and that the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:4-6 was just as true from Pentecost to Acts 28 as it has ever been since. Paul did not receive the revelation of the mystery after he went to prison. The rapture, which is part of that great mystery, is taught in his earliest Epistle—First Thessalonians. In his postscript to the Roman letter he tells how he has been making known the mystery throughout his ministry, "Made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." To the Ephesian elders he said (as recorded in Acts 20) that he had "not shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God." That counsel in its entirety had already been made known to him and was proclaimed among the Gentiles. The baptism of the Holy Spirit whereby believers were brought into the Body of

Christ took place on the day of Pentecost. It was thus that the Body, the Church, was formed. There is no hint of any such supernatural work in a wide-spread manner after Paul's imprisonment. The Body had been formed for years, and each believer was added to it when he received the Spirit. The one baptism of Ephesians 4:5, in my judgment, cannot refer to this event because this is already mentioned in the previous verse. In verse 4 we read, "There is one Body, and one Spirit, and one hope of your calling." This is the full revelation of the mystery, the Body formed by the Spirit's baptism, waiting for the coming of the Lord. In verse 5 we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." This is responsibility here on earth—Christ owned as Lord, the Church called upon to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and water baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in recognition of our subjection to the one Lord. It is not a question of form, formula, or subjects. It is simply the broad fact declared, that Christianity knows only one baptism, and that, of course, is baptism unto the death of Jesus Christ. To speak of the Holy Spirit's baptism as a burial with Christ unto death is nonsense. It is after my identification by faith in death, burial, and resurrection that the Holy Spirit baptizes me into the Body.

Nor is this to say that persons who for various

reasons, valid or otherwise, may not have been scripturally baptized are not in Christ. In drawing an illustration from what is scripturally correct one does not unchristianize those who fall short either because of ignorance or wilfulness. The argument of verse 12, as I see it, is this: the Christian confesses his identification with a rejected Christ in his baptism; he has owned that the man after the flesh deserved to die; he *has* died in Christ's death. This therefore is the end of the responsible man before God. Necessarily then, it is the end of all self-effort, of every attempt to improve the flesh by subjecting it to ordinances, that is, regulations, whether divinely given as in the Old Testament, or humanly devised as in so many unscriptural systems. God is not attempting to improve the old man, He has judged him as too evil for any improvement and has therefore set him to one side in death. Baptism is the recognition of this. It is burial unto death.

Some translators read, "Wherein also ye are risen with Him," but the preponderance of evidence is, I believe, in favor of the reading, "In whom also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised Him from the dead." It is through faith in the risen Christ that we become the recipients of the new life, and are henceforth accounted by God as those who, having gone down into death

with Him, are now one with Him in resurrection. What place does legality have here? None whatever. To put the new man, the man in Christ, under rules and regulations is contrary to the entire principle of new creation.

This is further emphasized in verse 13. We who once were dead in our trespasses and as Gentiles in the uncircumcision of our flesh have now been made to live together with Him, God having forgiven us all trespasses. The word is the same in each case, and if translated "sins" in the first part of the verse should be "sins" in the last, otherwise "trespasses" in each instance. Moreover, the bond that was against us ("the handwriting," a term which could only be properly used of the Ten Commandments, which we are distinctly told were the handwriting of God, embraced in ten ordinances, or divinely-given rules) because of the sinfulness of our natures, making our disobedience to the law, when once it came to our knowledge, a foregone conclusion, and which therefore made it to us a ministration of death and condemnation, has now been taken out of the way and no longer hangs over us as an unfulfilled obligation. Christ nailed it to His cross.

What are we to understand by this expression, "Nailing it to His cross"? It may help us if we remember that it was customary under Roman law, when criminals were executed by crucifixion,

hanging, or impalement, to write out a copy of the law they had broken, or to indicate the nature of their offence on a placard, and nail it above the victim's head, that all might know how Rome executed vengeance upon those who violated her criminal code. Pilate wrote out the inscription to be placed over the head of Christ Jesus, and that in three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, that all might know why the patient Sufferer from Galilee was being publicly executed. "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." As the people read this they understood that he was being crucified because He made Himself a king and was thus disloyal to Caesar. But as God looked upon that cross His holy eye saw, as it were, another inscription altogether. Nailed upon the rood above the head of His blessed Son was the handwriting of ten ordinances given at Sinai. It was because this law had been broken in every point that Jesus poured out His blood, thus giving His life to redeem us from the curse of the law. And so all of our sins have been settled for. There the law, which we had so dishonored, has been magnified to the full in the satisfaction which He made to the divine justice. Thus Christ has become the end of the law to every one that believeth. It is of course the Jewish believers Paul has in mind when he says "us," for Gentiles were not under the law. But it is true now in principle for us all, to whom the

knowledge of the law has come. Christ has, by His death, met every claim against us and cancelled the bond we could not pay.

And now as a victorious leader He has come forth from the tomb, having made a prey of the evil principalities and powers who gloated over His apparent defeat when He was crucified through weakness, but who are now themselves defeated in His resurrection. He has ascended to heaven in a glorious triumph, having made a spectacle of them, openly triumphing over them in His cross.

His be the Victor's name
Who fought the fight alone,
Triumphant saints no honor claim
His conquest was their own.

By weakness and defeat
He won the meed and crown,
Trod all our foes beneath His feet
By being trodden down.

Bless, bless the Conqueror slain,
Slain in His victory;
Who lived, who died, who lives again,
For thee, His Church, for thee.

He took our place upon the cross and now we share in all the results of that work. We are one with Him in the new creation. The law and all its ritual was given to man in the flesh. Christians are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,

and the law, as such, has nothing to say to the man in this new sphere beyond the reach of death. And so he concludes this marvelous section with a solemn admonition not to permit ourselves to be disturbed by any who would put us back under the law in any shape or form. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths." All these once had their place and he who would be an obedient child of the old covenant was called upon to observe the regulations regarding them scrupulously. All these, however, were but a shadow of things to come—things which have now come—"For the body is of Christ." In the Old Testament dispensation the light of God was shining upon Christ, and all the forms and ceremonies, including even the weekly sabbaths, were but shadows cast by Him. Since He Himself has come and fulfilled all the redemptive types the believer has "Everything in Jesus, and Jesus everything." The very fact that He links the sabbath with the other ceremonies shows clearly that the rule of life for the believer is not the ten words given at Sinai. While confessing this law to be holy, just and good, the new creation man is not under it. He is, as Paul expresses it elsewhere, "under law to Christ," or more properly "enlawed to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:22). That is, his responsibility now is to walk in fellowship with

the risen Christ, the Head of the Body of which he is but a feeble member, in whom dwells the Holy Spirit to be the power of the new life—manifested in subjection to the exalted Lord. None need fear that this will make for a lower standard of piety than if one were under the law as a rule of life. It is a far higher standard. He whose one thought and desire is to manifest the risen life of Christ in all his ways will lead a holier life than he who is seeking to subject the flesh to rules and regulations, even though given from heaven in a dispensation now past. This comes out very strongly in the contrast between the sabbath of the law and the Lord's day of the new creation. There is no commandment in the New Testament inculcating the sacredness of the first day of the week and demanding that Christians observe it scrupulously for holy purposes, yet the consensus of judgment of spiritually minded believers all through the centuries has led to the honoring of this day as a time of worship, meditation and Christian testimony, which has given it a preeminence from a spiritual standpoint that the Jewish sabbath never had.

Nor are we called upon to substitute a Christian ritual service for the Jewish ritual which we have discarded. We worship now by the Spirit of God whose delight it is to occupy the hearts of the redeemed with Him to whom they

owe all their blessing. Thus all that is fleshly or carnal must give way, as but prefatory and evanescent, and that which is spiritual and abiding takes its place.

LECTURE 9

CHRIST THE ANTIDOTE TO ORIENTAL MYSTICISM

Colossians 2:18-19

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the Body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

The natural man is distinctly religious. He does not need to be regenerated in order to *feel* after God. While it is true of all the unsaved that "there is none that seeketh after God" in the sense of seeking Him for His own sake, yet it has been well said that man is incurably religious; he must have something to worship. And so Satan has supplied him with cults of all descriptions to suit every type of mind. One of the oldest systems that has come down even to our own day is that of Parseeism, based upon the Zend Avesta, supposed to have originated with the Persian hero and prophet, Zoroaster, or Zarathustra, as he is called in the Persian scriptures. This system teaches a mystical dualism. Ahura Mazda, or Ormuzd, is the infinite God,

the Eternal Light; a lesser deity, Ahriman, the Prince of Darkness, sometimes looked upon as the creator of matter, is in constant conflict with the supreme deity. For twelve thousand years he is destined to wage war against the light and then his kingdom of darkness will be destroyed. This system permeated various schools of thought, and in apostolic days had been widely accepted throughout the Greek and Roman world under the name Mithraism. Its votaries went everywhere proclaiming it as the great unifying world religion. It was a vast secret society, its initiates going from one mystical degree to another until they became adepts. This Satanic system trembled before the advancing hosts of Christianity, and finally sought to combine certain of its views with a part of the Christian revelation; and, as we have already seen, by an eclectic combination of Judaism, Greek philosophy, and oriental mysticism a new religion was formed, divided, however, into many different sects all alike unsound as to Christ, and all rejecting the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and substituting the vain speculations of the human mind. Yet imitations of almost every Christian doctrine were found in some one or other of these systems, but with certain accretions and contradictions which made them most dangerous. Justin Martyr wrote some years after the apostle John passed from this scene, "Many spirits are abroad in the world and

the credentials they display are splendid gifts of mind, eloquence and logic. Christian, look carefully, and ask for the print of the nails." All these systems denied the true Christ of God who gave Himself for our sins upon the cross of shame. Some, like the Docetists, taught that the humanity of Jesus was simply an appearance, unreal and immaterial. The first Epistle of John meets this in a very wonderful way. Another sect, afterwards headed up in Cerinthus, the great arch-heretic of the second century, called by Polycarp, "the firstborn of Satan," taught that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary, who died on the cross finally to separate himself from his own sin, but to whom the Christ (identified with the eternal Spirit) came at his baptism and illumination, but left him at the cross. This system seems to be particularly before the mind of the Apostle Paul and he combats it in a masterly manner. In all of these systems knowledge was given the preeminence over faith. The latter, which is confidence in revealed testimony, was repudiated by these theorists who assumed acquaintance with divine mysteries far beyond that of ordinary people and quite in advance of the Biblical revelation. In their pride and folly they put a great number of spirit-beings, known as eons, between the soul and the unknowable God. These were all classified and named, as for instance, Reason, Wisdom, Power,

and similar divine attributes. All this appeals to the natural man. It sounds like humility to say, "In myself I am so utterly ignorant and unworthy, it is not for me to go directly to God the Father or to Christ the Son. I will therefore avail myself of mediating angels and spirits who can present my cause in a more suitable manner than I can myself." But it is really pride of intellect, and is the grossest unbelief, when God has declared that "there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time." The lowly man will receive what He has made known in His Word.

Through the infinite mercy of God the early Church triumphed largely over these Satanic efforts to ally these dying cults and systems with Christianity. The Holy Ghost so clearly exposed that the Church repudiated in one council after another these vile theories which would have made man his own Saviour. But all down the centuries since there have been those who from time to time have taken up certain elements of these discarded schools of thought and sought to foist them upon Christians as though they were new and wonderful truths. Romanism, with its doctrine of justification by works, purgatorial purification after death, and mediating saints and angels, has simply adopted much that the apostles refused, and palms it off on its credulous dupes

as traditional Christianity. Imagine anyone praying to saints and angels, or adoring their images, with the solemn words before him of this eighteenth verse, "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind." How striking the contrast between the expressions "voluntary humility" and "vainly puffed up." I recall a friend of my youth, a very gracious and kindly man, who had been brought up from childhood in the Roman communion, with whom I often sought to reason out of the Scriptures, in order to show him the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. I remember, when I asked why he prayed to the blessed Virgin Mary instead of directly to our Lord Jesus, how with an air of the greatest humility he answered, "Oh, I am too sinful, too utterly unworthy, to go directly to our blessed Lord. He is infinitely above me, so pure and holy, His majesty is so great that I would not dare to prostrate myself before Him. But I know that no one has such influence with a son as his mother, and I know, too, that a pure woman's tender heart feels for sinners in their sorrows and failures, therefore I go to the blessed Virgin Mary and pour out my heart to her as to my own mother, and I plead with her to speak for me to her holy, spotless Son, and I feel sure that she will influence Him as no other could."

This sounds like lowliness of mind and humility of spirit. It is really the most subtle kind of pride, for it involves proposing to be wiser than the revealed Word of God. There, as we have seen, we read of only the "one Mediator"; and we learn that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world"; that "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree"; that His tender heart was filled with compassion for sinners here on earth. None were too vile or degraded but that they were invited to come to Him. The worst His enemies could say of Him was, "This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." And up there in yonder glory He is the same Jesus that He was when here on earth. We may rest assured that "we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but One who was tempted in all points like as we are, apart from sin," and who is "able to succor those who are tempted." In His name we are bidden to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace for seasonable help." Why turn aside to angels or saints, however devoted, or even to His blessed mother herself, when we can go directly to Him, assured of His deep interest in all that concerns us? He made intercession for transgressors on the cross; up there at God's right hand He ever lives to make intercession for those who trust in Him. And so it is not an evidence of humility

to say, I am too unworthy to go to Christ; it is only unbelief that would lead one thus to speak. He stands with arms outstretched, pleading with all who are in trouble or distress, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." What base ingratitude to turn from Him to any other! What amazing folly to think it necessary to have anyone speak for me to Him, when He stands there showing His wounded hands and saying, "Peace be unto you." It is only pride and unbelief that would put Him off at a distance and bring angels in between.

This voluntary humility and worshipping of angels is in itself a complete denial of the new creation. It fails to recognize the wondrous truth that all believers are one Body with their exalted Head. And so the apostle goes on to say, "And not holding the Head, from which all the Body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." "Holding the Head" is recognizing our link with Him, both in life and by the Spirit. He, the exalted One at God's right hand, is the source of blessing for all His people in this scene. As of old the holy oil poured upon Aaron's head went down to the skirts of his garment (Ps. 133:2), so now from the Head in heaven blessing in the Spirit's power comes down to every member of His Body on the earth. It will be observed that the figure of a body is not mere-

ly that of a society or, as we would say, an organization. It is far more wonderful than that. It is a divine organism. Just as truly as all the members of a human body form the complete man, so do all believers in Christ, through the Spirit's baptism, form the one new man. See in this connection 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and Ephesians 2:15. If out of touch with the Head through failure to apprehend the intimacy of our relation to Him we put anything or any creature between ourselves and Him, we are not holding the Head. Satan knows, as one has well put it, that if he could get but the thickness of a sheet of paper between the Head and the Body, all life would be destroyed. This, of course, can never be, but it is sadly possible so utterly to misunderstand our relation to the Head, and so fail to avail ourselves of the supplies of grace that might be ours did we but walk in fellowship with Him, that we would be out of communion with Him and therefore not consciously guided by Him.

We are told that from the Head all the Body is nourished, and this through the ministry of joints and bands placed in the Body for this very purpose by the Holy Spirit, so that all being knit together grows, or increases, with the increase of God. This is most blessedly expanded and elaborated in Ephesians 4:11-16. There we see how the risen Lord has given various gifts to His Church for the perfecting of the saints, with a

view to the work of the ministry for the edifying of the Body of Christ. Note specially verses 15 and 16, where we are told that He would have us "grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole Body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the Body unto the edifying of itself in love." What a marvelous picture is this, and how strikingly does the one passage complement the other, and what responsibility does it put upon each one of us as members of Christ and members one of another! There are no useless members in this Body. Just as in the human body every joint, every ligament, every hidden part, has some service to perform for the good of the whole, even though as yet physicians and surgeons may not fully understand the need of every gland and organ, and may speak, as some do, of certain useless parts, or discarded vestiges of earlier forms, yet we may be very sure that God in His infinite wisdom has a use for every member of the body; so in the mystical Body of Christ let no believer think of himself as useless, as without any special gift, and therefore as having no part in the building up of the whole. There is one term used in 1 Corinthians 12:28 that is most suggestive; it is the little word "helps." Notice how it is sandwiched in

between gifts of healings and governments. We may not all have spectacular gifts, but we can all be helps. The apostle writing to one Church says, "Ye all being helpers together by prayer." Here is a service the feeblest saint may perform for the benefit of the whole Body.

If in spiritual health each member will function aright for the edification of all; but just as in the natural order diseased members become a menace to the entire body, so Christians out of fellowship with God, in a low or carnal state, are hindrances where they should be helpers. May each one of us be concerned about our responsibility here. May we be so occupied with our blessed, glorified Head, so careful to see that there is nothing interfering with our communion with Him, that He may be able to use us as joints or bands to minister nourishment and blessing to His people that all may be the more knit together because of our faithfulness in seeking to be helpers of one another's faith, that thus the Body may indeed increase with the increase of God.

And now in closing let me say a word to my younger brethren in Christ who seek to preach the gospel, or to minister for the edification of believers. Bear in mind that if you would be true ministers of Jesus Christ you are to preach the Word and seek to occupy your hearers with the truth of God. Do not, I beg of you, give way

to a very common vanity of preachers, speculation in regard to things not revealed. You are not sent forth to acquaint men with unsubstantiated theories, nor to occupy their minds with speculative systems. God has entrusted you with His own holy Word, and He holds you responsible to give that out in all its clearness and simplicity. One "Thus saith the Lord" is worth a ton of human thoughts and ideas. Unreliable theological disquisitions and philosophical discussions never saved one poor sinner or comforted a discouraged saint. It is the truth of God, ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit, that alone can accomplish this. All else is but wasting precious time, and is dishonoring to the Lord who sent you out to proclaim His truth. This divinely given message ministered in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven, will awaken the careless, quicken the dead in trespasses and sins, give peace to the anxious, comfort the distressed, and sanctify believers. To substitute the empty dreams of carnal, or unregenerate men for this, is the utmost folly. Of old, God said, through Jeremiah, "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream, and he that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? said the Lord" (Jer. 23:28).

To add to His Word is but to pervert it. Neither tradition, nor the voice of the Church, nor yet fancied superior intellectual illumination,

can complete that which is already perfect—the revelation of the mind of God in His holy Word. "The Bible and the Bible alone" is the foundation of our faith.

LECTURE 10

CHRIST THE ANTIDOTE TO CARNAL ASCETICISM

Colossians 2:20-23

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.

It is a great mistake and a fatal blunder into which the best of people readily fall, to fail to distinguish the two very different senses in which the term "the flesh" is used in the Bible. Sometimes it refers solely to our bodies, "this mortal flesh," but in the doctrinal parts of the New Testament it generally means the nature which fallen man has inherited from his first father. God created man, we are told, "in His own image, after His own likeness, male and female created He them, and called their name Adam in the day when they were created" (Gen. 5:2). Physically perfect, they were morally innocent, and spiritually like unto God, who is a Spirit and the Father of spirits. But in the

very next verse we read, "Adam begat a son in his own likeness after his image" (Gen. 5:3). This was after sin had defiled his nature and poisoned the springs of life; and all his children now bear this fallen image and likeness.

Hence the need of regeneration, and so our Lord said to Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He is not merely saying that that which is born of the physical body is a physical body, but that personality which comes into the world through natural generation and birth is one with the fallen nature which Adam acquired when he fell. This is called distinctively, "the flesh," "the body of the flesh," "sin in the flesh," "sin that dwelleth in us," "the carnal mind which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"; and is the nature of the old man—the unregenerate natural man. We are told that we all were by nature children of wrath, even as others. When converted, or regenerated, this carnal nature is not altered in the slightest degree; it is never improved nor sanctified, either in whole or in part. In the cross of Christ God has condemned it utterly as too vile for improvement. The believer has received a new nature which is spiritual, the nature of the new man; and he is now responsible to walk in obedience to the Word of God, which appeals only to this new nature. The old and the new natures are in the

believer and will be until the redemption of the body.

It is true that the flesh, or the old nature, acts through the members of the body, but the body itself is not evil. Every natural instinct or physical appetite, no matter how perfectly right and proper it may be, and used as God intended, may be perverted to selfish and dishonorable purposes. But we are called upon to mortify, or put to death, the deeds of the body and no longer to yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. but to present the body with all its ransomed powers unto God, to be used for His service under the controlling power of His Holy Spirit. Hence the Christian is called to a life of self-abnegation and so the Apostle Paul could say, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection." But by that he does not mean that he visits needless punishment upon his physical flesh in order to purify his spirit, but rather that he does not permit unlawful or inordinate physical appetites to dominate him, and so lead him into excesses which would bring dishonor upon the ministry committed to him and upon the name of the Lord whose servant he is. This subjection of the body will ever be necessary as long as we are in this scene of testing. So the Apostle Peter tells us, "He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." It is not that we obtain deliverance from the power of sin by ascetic

practices such as flagellation, fasting, or ignoring physical comfort, but rather by refusing obedience to carnal impulses the gratification of which may give physical pleasure while they war against the soul.

And in this we may see the contrast between our Lord's temptation and our own. Of Him we read that "He suffered being tempted." Of us, that we cease from sin if we suffer in the flesh. In other words, to Him, the Holy One, temptation caused the keenest suffering. His holy nature shrank from the slightest contact with evil even in Satanic suggestion. But with us, fallen as we are, the suggestion of evil may be seductively pleasing, and we must resolutely refuse the thought of sensual pleasure in order that we may walk in purity before God. "He was tempted in all things like as we are, apart from sin." That is, He was never tempted by inward desire for sin. He could say, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." With us it is far otherwise; when temptation is presented from without we are sadly conscious of the fact that we have a traitor within who would open the door of the fortress to the enemy if he were not carefully watched. And right here is where purpose of heart is needed in order that we may cleave to the Lord and give no ground to the suggestions of the flesh or the promptings of the Adversary.

An Indian, in explaining the conflict of the two natures, said, "It seems to me as though two dogs are fighting within me: one is a black dog, and he is very savage and very bad; the other is a white dog, and he is very gentle and very good; but the black dog fights with him all the time." "And which dog wins?" someone asked. Laconically the Indian replied, "Which ever one I say 'sic him' to." And it was well put, for if the will is on the side of the evil, the flesh will triumph; but if the will is subdued by grace and subject to the Holy Spirit the new nature will control.

It is for lack of understanding this important truth that many have supposed they could perfect themselves in holiness by imposing penances and suffering of various kinds upon the body. At a very early day such views came into the Church. The Jewish Essenes and the Stoic philosophers had accustomed both Jews and Gentiles to the thought that the body in itself is evil, and must be subdued if one would advance in holiness. These views were taken up by certain sects of Gnostics, while others went to the opposite extreme and taught that the spiritual alone was important, and that the body might be used in any way without polluting the soul.

But in these last four verses of our present chapter the apostle warns against the folly of seeking holiness through asceticism. He de-

scribes these practices as being part of that philosophy of which he has already spoken in verse 8, which he designated the rudiments, or elements of the world. Challenging the believer, as a new man in Christ, who died with Him to his old place and condition in the world, he asks: "Wherefore if ye died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men?" I have purposely left out certain parenthetical expressions which we will look at in a moment. The great thing now to see is that all these rules and regulations for the subduing of the body are according to the principles of the world. They all take for granted that God is still trying in some way to improve the flesh, and this we know is not His purpose. Through John the Baptist He said, "The axe is laid to the *root* of the tree."

Not only in modern times, but in those early days of Christianity which we are considering, men have laid the axe, or the pruning-knife, if you will, to the *fruit* of the tree, as though the tree might be improved if the bad fruit were cut off. Get men to reform, to sign pledges, to put themselves under rules and regulations, to starve the body, to inflict physical suffering upon it, and surely its vile propensities will be at least annulled if not eliminated, and little by little men will become spiritual and godlike. The formula

which thousands have taken up within the last few years,

> Every day, in every way,
> I am getting better and better,

expresses the mind of many. But no amount of self-control, no physical suffering whatever can change the carnal mind, called emphatically, "the flesh."

Saint Jerome tells how, having lived a lecherous life in his youth, after he became a Christian he fled from all contact with the gross and vulgar world in which he had once sought to gratify every fleshly desire. He left Rome and wandered to Palestine, and there lived in a cave near Bethlehem, where he sought to subdue his carnal nature by fasting almost to starvation. And then he tells us how disappointed he was when, exhausted and weary, he fell asleep and dreamed he was still rioting among the dissolute companions of his godless days. The flesh cannot be starved into subjection. It cannot be improved by subjecting it to ordinances whether human or divine. But as we walk in the Spirit, and are occupied thus with the risen Christ, we are delivered from the power of fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

In the parenthetical portion of verses 21 and 22 the apostle gives us a sample, if we may so

say, of the carnal ordinances or doctrines of men to which he refers, "Touch not; taste not; handle not." He is not saying, Do not touch, taste, or handle these ascetic regulations—that would be nonsense—but these are the human rules, through obedience to which the ascetic hoped to attain to a higher degree of spirituality. How often we have heard this 21st verse quoted as though for the guidance of Christians to-day, exactly the opposite of that which the apostle intended. All such regulations are to perish with the using.

These things have, indeed, an appearance of wisdom in will worship and humility and neglecting of the body, or punishing the body by making it suffer. It is natural to suppose that such things would have a tendency to free one from carnal desires, but untold thousands of monks, hermits, and ascetics of all descriptions, have proved that they are useless against the indulgence of the flesh. One may shut himself up in a monastery in order to escape the world, only to find he has taken the world in with him. One may dwell in a cave in the desert in order to subdue the flesh, only to find that the more the body is weakened and neglected, the more powerful the flesh becomes.

Dr. A. T. Robertson translates the last part of verse 20: "Why, as though living in the world, do you dogmatize; such as, Touch not; taste not; handle not?" These rules may be elevated

to the importance of dogmas but they will never enable one to achieve the object he has in view. You have heard of the man who, anxious to fit himself for the presence of God, and awakened to a sense of the emptiness of a life of worldly pleasure, fled from the city to the desert and made his home in a cave in the rocks, there practising the greatest austerities, and hoping through prayer and penance to reach the place where he would be acceptable to God. Hearing of another hermit who was reputed to be a very holy and devout man, he made a long, wearisome journey across the desert, supported only by his staff, in order to interview him and learn from him how he might find peace with God. In answer to his agonized questions the aged anchorite said to him, "Take that staff, that dry rod which is in your hand, plant it in the desert soil, water it daily, offering fervent prayers as you do so, and when it bursts into leaf and bloom you may know that you have made your peace with God."

Rejoicing that at last he had what seemed like authoritative instruction in regard to this greatest of all ventures, he hastened back to his cell and planted his rod as he had been told to do. For long, weary days, weeks, and months, he faithfully watered the dry stick and prayed for the hour when the token of his acceptance would be manifest; until at last one day, in utter despair and brokenness of spirit, weakened by fasting

and sick with longing for the apparently unattainable, he exclaimed bitterly, "It is all no use; I am no better to-day than I was when I first came to the desert. The fact is, I am just like this dry stick myself. It needs life ere there can be leaves and fruit; and I need life, for I am dead in my sins and cannot produce fruit for God." And then it seemed as though a voice within said, "At last you have learned the lesson that the old hermit meant to teach you. It is because you are dead and have no strength or power in yourself that you must turn to Christ alone and find life and peace in Him." And leaving his desert cave he went back to the city to find the Word of God and in its sacred pages learn the way of peace.

And let us remember it is as impossible to obtain holiness by ascetic practices as it is to buy salvation by physical suffering. We are saved in the first place, not through anything we undergo, but through that which our blessed Lord Jesus Christ underwent for us on Calvary's cross, and, blessed be God, He who died for us upon that cross now lives for us at God's right hand, and He is the power for holiness as well as for justification. By the Holy Spirit He dwells within us, and as we yield ourselves unto God as those who are alive from the dead, He is enabled to live out His wondrous life in us. Does your heart sometimes cry:

Tell me what to do to be pure
In the sight of all-seeing eyes;
Tell me is there no thorough cure,
No escape from the sins I despise?
Will my Saviour only pass by,
Only show how faulty I've been?
Will He not attend to my cry?
May I not this moment be clean?

Oh, believe me, dear, anxious, seeking Christian, you will find holiness in the same Christ in whom you found salvation. As you cease from self-occupation and look up in faith to Him you will be transformed into His own glorious image; you will become like Him as you gaze on His wonderful face. There is no other way by which the flesh may be subdued and your life become one of triumph over the power of sin. Asceticism is but a vain will-o'-the-wisp which, while it promises you victory, will plunge you into the morass of disappointment and defeat. But occupation with Christ risen at God's right hand is the sure way to overcome the lusts of the flesh and to become like Him who has said, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth."

Of Him they said He was a glutton and a wine-bibber, because He came, not as an ascetic but as a Man among men, entering with them into every sinless experience of human life. He has "left us an example that we should follow

His steps." He has come to sanctify every natural relationship, not to do violence to those affections and feelings which He Himself implanted in the hearts of mankind.

LECTURE 11

CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S LIFE AND OBJECT

Colossians 3:1-4

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.

After the somewhat lengthy digression of verses 13 to 23 in the previous chapter, the apostle comes back to apply the truth taught in verse 12. I think we shall get the connection better if we read these two passages without anything intervening: "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." All that has come in between these two verses was in the nature of warning against false systems that would have robbed the believer of this great truth of unity with Christ in death and

resurrection. It is of all importance that we realize that we do not stand before God on the ground of responsibility. The responsible man failed utterly to keep his obligations. There was nothing for him, therefore, but condemnation, but our Lord Jesus Christ has borne that condemnation; He voluntarily, in infinite grace, took the place of the sinner and bore his judgment upon the cross. Now in resurrection, as we have seen, all who believe are not only given a perfect representation by Him before the throne of God, but we are in Him in virtue of being partakers of His life. "In Adam" meant that we were born of his race; "in Christ," in contrast clearly indicates that we have received a new life from Him and, therefore, we are not to think of ourselves as in any sense on probation. All that was ended on the cross of Christ.

Jesus died and we died with Him,
Buried in His grave we lay,
One in Him in resurrection,
Soon with Him in Heaven's bright day.

Death and judgment are behind us,
Grace and glory are before;
All the billows rolled o'er Jesus,
There exhausted all their power.

It is when the soul enters into this experimentally, realizing that the death of Christ, in which faith has given him part, has severed the

link that bound him to the world and all its purposes and has freed him from all necessity to be subject to sin in the flesh, that he will be free to glorify God as he walks in newness of life. Most theological systems fail to apprehend this great truth of the new man in Christ, hence so few believers have settled peace and realize their union with Him who sits at God's right hand, not only as the Head of the Church, but as the Head of every man who has found life through Him.

Occupation, then, with Christ risen in the energy of the Holy Spirit, is the power for holiness. We are called upon to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Our real life is there, our truest, best interests are all identified with Him. Heavenly-mindedness is the natural, or I should say, spiritual outcome of this realization. As the heart is taken up with Him we will be concerned about representing Him aright in this world where He is still rejected and His claims refused.

The marginal reading of verse 2 is better than the text of the Authorized Version—"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." That is, as a watch is set to the sun, in order to mark the time correctly, so let your mind be set to Christ risen, in order that His life may be seen in you. This is in contrast to the things

spoken of in Philippians 3:19—"who mind earthly things." The time for this is past for those who are now one with Christ risen. This will not make us impractical and visionary, but we shall live all the more consistently, thus fulfilling our varied responsibilities in the home, in business, in the State and, of course, in the Church, as our minds are fixed on heavenly things. This is indeed the "ribbon of blue" to which reference was made in an earlier address. We will manifest the heavenly character, just where we come closest into contact with the things of the earth. I think we may see in Christ during the forty days between resurrection and ascension something of what this involves. He was still here upon the earth but He was altogether heavenly. "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him so no more," and we are called into association with Him to manifest the heavenly character as we walk the desert sands. Men of the world will not understand this, and we need not expect them to; but nevertheless they can and will recognize and appreciate true piety and Christian character even though they hate those who possess it, as Cain hated Abel because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous. But it should be true of us, as of our blessed Lord Himself, that this hatred is undeserved, according as it was written of Him, "They hated Me without a cause."

The third verse epitomizes this in a very wonderful way, "For ye have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." We have died to all that we once were as children of Adam, and now we do not have independent life as Christians, but Christ Himself is our life and, while it is true we have this eternal life abiding in us, He who is the source and sustainer of it is hidden yonder in the heavens "in God," and so our life is safe in His keeping. One can understand and appreciate the rather crude expression of the simple brother who, after his conversion, had been greatly concerned lest by some sinful act or lack of faith he might in some way forfeit his salvation and lose the new life given in grace. But as he listened to an address upon these wonderful words of this third verse, his anxiety disappeared and he exclaimed with rapture, "Glory to God! Whoever heard of a man drowning with his head that high above water!" Admitting all their crudity, his words nevertheless expressed a great truth. Our Head is in heaven, our life is in Him, hidden in God, therefore we are eternally one with Him and nothing can ever separate the Christian from the risen Christ.

Outwardly, believers in the Lord Jesus are like other men, they are still in dying bodies, and often distressed by the flesh within and in conflict with Satan and the world without, yet each believer is to walk through this scene in the

power of resurrection life, manifesting his union with his glorified Head. He is called to be a man of God, though in the humblest condition of life.

There is no glory halo
  Round his devoted head,
No luster marks the sacred path
  In which his footsteps tread.

But holiness is graven
  Upon his thoughtful brow,
And all his steps are ordered
  In the light of Heaven e'en now.

He often is peculiar,
  And oft misunderstood,
And yet his power is felt by all–
  The evil and the good.

For he doth live in touch with Heaven
  A life of faith and prayer;
His hope, his purpose, and his all,
  His life is centered there.

This is indeed to be a consistent member of the Body of Christ, manifestly displaying the character of the new man whose Head is in Heaven. And, though like his Lord despised and rejected of men, the Christian is called to run with patience the race set before him, knowing that the day of manifestation is nearing when he, too, according to his measure, shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Christ will

find His satisfaction in us, we will find ours in Him.

He and I in that bright glory
One deep joy will share;
Mine to be forever with Him,
His that I am there.

And when the day of the Lord dawns after earth's long, dark night—or, to put it in another way, after man's garish day is ended—then those who are content to be strangers and pilgrims here during His rejection, shall shine forth with Him when He comes to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. And so we read in verse four, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." We might read, "be manifested," for "appear"—it would perhaps make the thought even clearer. When He with whom we have died and in whom we are risen shall return from Heaven and be manifested before His earthly people who will be waiting for Him in that day, and before His foes as well, then we also shall be manifested with Him in glory.

As we think of His coming we know it is presented to us in two aspects in the New Testament, and perhaps that which appeals most to every real lover of Christ is what we commonly call "the Rapture." Our hearts long for the hour when "the Lord Himself shall descend from

heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first, and we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." We think of this as the end of the race, and as the time, too, when "He will change these bodies of our humiliation and make them like unto the body of His glory," when "this mortal shall put on immortality and this corruptible shall put on incorruption," and we shall be fully "conformed to the image of God's Son." This will be the fulfilment of our Lord's promise given before He went away: "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also." This will be the occasion of our reception into the Father's house: but all of this, blessed as it is, and calculated to stir the souls of His waiting ones to their deepest depths, is but an introduction to the glories yet to be revealed in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is coming back to the earth that rejected Him, and all His saints are coming with Him, not, of course, to take up human conditions here in the world again; but in resurrection bodies to appear with Him before the astonished eyes of those who still reject Him, and to the delight of those who will be waiting for Him as the delivering King in that

day when the word will be fulfilled, "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him, and all the tribes of the land shall wail because of Him." That will be the time when we shall appear with Him in glory, and to this the apostle refers again in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-11, where he comforts the suffering saints with the assurance that tribulation will be recompensed to those that trouble them, and rest will be the portion of the redeemed, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day." I have purposely omitted the parenthetical words, "because our testimony among you was believed." They explain why any from among earth's inhabitants will be associated with Christ in the glory of that revelation.

Lamb of God, Thou soon in glory
Wilt to this sad earth return;
All Thy foes shall quake before Thee,
All that now despise Thee, mourn.

Then shall we, at Thine appearing,
With Thee in Thy kingdom reign;

Thine the praise and Thine the glory,
Lamb of God for sinners slain!

This is the consummation to which the Christian dispensation is tending; when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and His one-time pilgrim people shall reign with Him in righteousness throughout Messiah's glorious years.

And with this the apostle completes the doctrinal teaching of the Epistle to the Colossians. In these first two chapters with which the three opening verses of chapter three are linked, he has unfolded in a marvelous way the truth of the new creation and our link with the risen Man, God's firstborn Son, the Heir of all things. We have seen that in Him we have deliverance from the power of darkness and we are even now translated into His spiritual kingdom; in Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and have been made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. He has made peace by the blood of His cross, and we have been reconciled to God through His death. We are now members of His mystical Body and thus members one of another, called upon to hold the Head and in all things to be subject to Him as we pursue our way in faith through the wilderness of this world. Christ Himself is to be our heart's blessed object. He is the Antidote for every form of error, for in Him all the fulness of the Godhead

dwells, and our fulness is found alone in Him. We have been identified with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. All that was against us He has taken out of the way, paying our bond and nailing it to His cross. He Himself is now to be the portion of our souls, and as we are occupied with Him, the risen One, with mind and heart set on heavenly things, we shall manifest His life here on earth while we wait for His return, when we shall be manifested with Him in glory. What a gospel! Surely it was never conceived in the mind of man. It could not be, for it makes nothing of man but everything of Christ. May our hearts enter into it more and more as the days grow darker and the end draws near, "While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen," and live in daily expectation of His return to take us to be with Himself and make us fully like Himself forevermore.

For God has fixed the happy day,
When the last tear shall dim our eyes,
When He will wipe these tears away,
And fill our hearts with glad surprise.
To hear His voice, and see His face,
And know the fulness of His grace.

This blessed consummation of all our hopes is set clearly before us in the Word of God as our goal—in order that, cheered by the glory shining from the gates of the city, we may be heart-

ened and lifted above discouragement, and the depressing power of present sorrows, whether in the world or the Church, so that we may run the race with patience, ever "looking unto Jesus."

Part Two

PRACTICAL

Colossians 3:5–4:18

LECTURE 12

PRACTICAL HOLINESS BY CONFORMITY TO CHRIST

Part 1: In Relation To Ourselves.

Colossians 3:5-11

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

We come now to the consideration of the practical teaching of the Epistle, where we have emphasized for us the importance of walking in the power of the truth of the new man and our relationship to Christ as Head. And in this section,

which includes verses 5 to 17 and is too lengthy to be taken up in one address, we have, first, that which relates to ourselves, our individual judgment of the old ways, in verses 5 to 11, which we will consider at this time. Then in verses 12 to 17, we have rather our relationship to others, particularly our brethren in Christ; or, as we might put it, the claims of Christian fellowship. We must be right ourselves, in our own inner lives, if we would be right toward others. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." What I am when alone in the presence of God is what I really am. What I am before my fellows should be the outcome of this, otherwise my public life will be largely a sham.

There is a very suggestive lesson along this line in connection with the fine linen in the tabernacle. The tabernacle, as we know, was primarily a wonderful type of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was God's dwelling place; and we read, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Surrounding the court of the tabernacle were curtains of fine twined linen suspended from pillars. The fine linen, we learn from Revelation 19, is "the righteous acts of the saints" (*literal rendering*). Therefore the fine linen surrounding the court would speak of the perfect

ways of our Lord Jesus Christ as displayed before men on earth. The hangings of the court were visible to all who drew near; but inside, covering the upright boards of the tabernacle, which were of acacia wood overlaid with gold, were ten curtains also of fine twined linen. These were not visible to men on the outside; they were seen by God Himself and, in measure, by His ministering priests. So if the fine linen outside speaks of Christ's righteousness as Man on earth visible to the eyes of other men, which led them to exclaim, "He hath done all things well," and which caused even Pilate to declare, "I find no fault in Him," the ten curtains inside would speak of His perfect righteousness as seen by God the Father, that perfection which caused Him to open the heavens and proclaim, "This is My beloved Son in whom I have found all My delight."

Now how many cubits of fine twined linen were there forming the wall of the court? We learn that the court was 100 cubits long and 50 cubits wide. Subtracting 20 cubits for the varicolored gate of the tabernacle, we have 280 cubits, 100 on each side, 50 in the rear, and 30 in front. Inside there were ten curtains joined together, and each one was 28 cubits long. Here then we have another 280 cubits. Note this well. There were 280 cubits of fine twined linen surrounding the court where all could behold it, and 280 cubits

of fine twined linen forming the tabernacle itself, where only the eye of God saw it in its completeness! How suggestive is all this, and what a lesson for us. Our blessed Lord was just the same before God as before men. But the fact that the width of the curtains was different to that of the hangings is also suggestive. The curtains were four cubits wide, and four is the number of weakness, and speaks of Christ's perfect subjection to the will of the Father. The hangings were five cubits wide, and five, we know, is the number of responsibility, and suggests our Lord's taking the place of responsibility here on earth, as meeting every claim of God which man had flouted. When His enemies came asking, "Who art Thou?" He answered, "Altogether what I have said unto you." With Him profession and life were in perfect agreement, and this is the standard which God now puts before the believer.

Recognizing, then, our union with Christ, we are called upon to manifest His life. There must be first of all the judgment of the old ways in their totality. In chapter 2 we have learned of our identification with Him in His death; in the cross we were circumcised with the circumcision of Christ, therefore we are to mortify, or put to death, our members which are upon the earth. The believer is never told to crucify himself; he is told to mortify the members of his body. We

have been crucified with Christ. Faith lays hold of this, and so it is written, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." All passed under judgment in the cross, but in order to make this practical the flesh must be kept, by faith, in the place of death and its evil promptings refused in self-judgment. The apostle insists first of all upon the importance of dealing unsparingly with the sins that were so common in the heathen world out of which these Colossians had been saved. Sins, alas, almost as common in the world to-day, in spite of increased light and civilization. The believer, recognizing his link with Christ, is to abhor all uncleanness. He is to remember that the body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body, consequently every tendency to the sins mentioned in verse 5—fornication, lasciviousness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence (or, unlawful lusts), and covetousness, which is idolatry (for in reality it is the worship of self)—all these are to be judged in the light of the cross of Christ at no matter what cost. No excuse must be offered for such sins nor any palliation of their wickedness attempted on the ground of the innate tendencies of human nature. These things are abhorrent to God and abhorrent to the new nature in every believer, and because of them the wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience; as of old, when God destroyed the

antediluvian world because of corruption and violence, and rained fire from heaven upon the cities of the plain because of unbridled lusts and passions.

In these sins, so characteristic of men away from God, the Colossians had once walked, living in them unblushingly; but that was before they knew Christ. Now, as risen with Him, these things, seen at last in their true light, must be refused as dishonoring to God and contrary to Christ. Other sins there are which in the eyes of many are far less vile and abominable than those mentioned above, but these, too, are to be put off. They were the habits of the old man, his old clothes, which are not fit to adorn the new man. And so we read, "But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." The old man is more than the old nature. It is the man of old, the man you used to be before you knew Christ as Saviour and Lord. In other words, the old man is all that I once was as an unsaved person. I am through with that man; he has disappeared, for faith, in the cross of Christ. But if I make this profession, let me be sure that I do not manifest his ways. Sometimes those who make the loudest professions in regard to the truth of the new creation are the poorest performers of

the truth, and thus they give the lie to what they say by what they do. It was Emerson, I think, who said, "What you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say." It is to be feared that many a Christian has lost his testimony because of carelessness here.

Anger, which, as we know from Ephesians 4:26, may be righteous, is generally but the raging of the flesh, and even where it is warranted (and we read of our blessed Lord looking round about upon His opponents with anger because of the hardness of their hearts), still this must not be nursed or it will degenerate into wrath, which is a settled condition of ill feeling toward an offender and generally has coupled with it a desire for revenge, and so malice springs from it. We have three generations of sin here: anger cherished begets wrath, and wrath if not judged begets malice. No matter how grievously I have been wronged I am not to give place to the devil and malign, or seek to harm, the one against whom I may have been righteously indignant in the beginning. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil."

Blasphemy—This dreadful sin may be either Godward or manward. To impute evil to God or to seek to misrepresent Him, or to pervert the truth as to the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, these are various ways in which men blaspheme against God. But to speak injuriously of one

another, to circulate wicked and untruthful reports against one's brethren, to revile rulers or governors, or to seek to harm, by evil report, servants of God, all these are included under the general term blasphemy, and here how often have sharp-tongued religious controversialists failed even at the very moment that they were endeavoring to meet the blasphemy of their opponents in regard to divine things. When the hyper-Calvinist, the father of William Hone, the one-time infidel, described John Wesley as a child of the devil because of his Arminianism, he had himself fallen into the sin of blasphemy. No wonder his son turned from such Christianity in horror, and was for years in darkness, till reached by divine grace. Railing accusations ill become those who have been saved through mercy alone and have occasion daily to confess their own sins and sue for divine forgiveness. The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, and He, the Holy One, is not served by our hard speeches against His saints, nor even against men of the world.

Did we not know the corruption of our own hearts it might not seem necessary to warn redeemed saints against the vice of using unclean language or relating salacious stories, but this is what is involved in the next expression, "filthy communication out of your mouth." Questionable stories and the relating of things true or

false, the details of which only tend to feed a corrupt nature, these are to be shunned by a Christian. It was a wise answer and a deserved rebuke that a brother once gave to one in my own presence who began a story with the remark, "As there are no ladies here I want to tell you something I heard the other day." But the other checked him by saying, "Brother, though there are no ladies present the Holy Ghost is here. Is your story fit for Him?" The first blushed in confusion and accepted the rebuke. We did not hear the story.

Were there any truth in the unscriptural theory held by some that the nature of the old man is eradicated in the case of a sanctified believer there would be no room whatever for the next injunction, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." Lying is one of the very first evidences of the carnal nature. Of the wicked we read, "They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." And untruthfulness is one of the hardest habits for anyone to overcome. It is so natural to these vain hearts of ours to try to make things appear better than they really are, to cover up our own failures and to accentuate the sins of others. Yet these are just different forms of lying, and we are called upon to judge all guile—untruthfulness of every character—in the light of the cross of Christ. The old man was judged there in the

person of our Substitute, his deeds are to be refused, his habits put off as discarded garments which, as we have seen above, are in no sense fit for the new man.

In the next two verses we are told that we "have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." The new man, then, is the man in Christ, even as the old man was the man in Adam. This new man has a new, divinely-imparted nature, and it is to this new nature God by the Spirit appeals. The new nature alone is capable of receiving divine instruction, and as the truth thus imparted controls the life, the believer manifests increasingly the image of Him who is the Head of the new creation. He Himself, as we have seen, is the image of the invisible God. Man was created in the image and likeness of God in the beginning, but that image became terribly marred through sin. In the new man this image again becomes manifest, and the very lineaments of Christ are seen in His people, and this is true, no matter who or what they were before receiving the new life, whether cultured Greek or religious Jew; whether within the circle of the Abrahamic covenant marked off from the rest of humanity by the ordinance

of circumcision, or whether in the world outside, strangers to the covenants of promise; whether barbarian or Scythian (that is, of the wild tribes outside the pale of civilization); whether slaves or free citizens; all alike were sinners; all alike are included in the term "the old man." Now those who through grace have believed the gospel, from whichever of these classes they may have come, are members of the new creation and are seen by God as justified from all things and are possessors of a new and divine life. They belong to that new company where Christ is everything and in everyone. This is not to deny racial or class distinctions in the world—these the Christian must still recognize, and he has his responsibilities as to these distinctions—but above and beyond all these responsibilities is his new place in Christ, linked up with the new Head. It is from this that his new responsibilities flow; because he is a new creation man, he is called upon to manifest new ways and to put on new habits, new clothes suited to his new relationship. These new clothes will come before us next.

In closing let me remark that new creation is not simply individual. It is not merely that I, as a believer, am a new creature in Christ Jesus. A better rendering of 2 Corinthians 5:17 would be, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, it is new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Joyful now the new creation
Rests in undisturbed repose;
Blest in Jesus' full salvation
Sorrow now nor thraldom knows.

Not yet do we see the manifestation of all this, but "we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor," seated above all the changing scenes of time. Till He returns, it is as members of the new creation that we are called upon by our new ways to manifest the holiness, the grace, the righteousness, the love, and the compassion of Him who is "the beginning of the creation of God."

It is not that He is the first being created. This error was exposed in an earlier lecture. But He is the first, the Prince, the Head, the Origin of the New Creation where all things are of God. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature [or a new creation], and as many as walk according to this rule"—the rule; the controlling principle of this new creation—"peace be upon them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:15-16). This is the very opposite of legality. It is the spontaneous expression of the life of the Head in the members here on earth!

LECTURE 13

PRACTICAL HOLINESS BY CONFORMITY TO CHRIST

Part 2: In Relation To Others.

Colossians 3:12-17

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one Body: and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.

We now come to consider our new clothes, the garments of the new man—these things which we are to put on in place of the old habits which have been discarded. It is a striking thing that both in the Scriptures and in our ordinary Anglo-Saxon speech, we use at times the same words for clothing and behavior. We speak of a riding habit, a walking habit, habits of various descriptions, meaning of course, the clothing worn on

particular occasions, and we may speak of our behavior as our habit. When in the Old Testament Solomon says, "Let thy garments be always white," we understand him, of course, to mean, let your habits or behavior be pure and righteous. The wicked are depicted as clothed with filthy garments, and self-righteousness is described as but filthy rags. The characteristics of the newborn man are garments of glory and beauty. It is a common saying that you judge a man by his clothes. It is true that this is not always just. Many a princely character has, through poverty, been obliged to dress in worn and unbecoming garments, while rascals of the deepest dye have been arrayed like princes of the blood. But the same is true at times in regard to children of God and the unsaved. There are wolves who come in sheeps' clothing, there are ministers of Satan who appear as ministers of righteousness, and, alas, there are real believers whose garments are often badly stained and rent by failure and sin. But in the ordinary course of things it is true that men are largely estimated according to their appearance, and Christians are expected to be adorned with good works and thus justify before men the profession they make of justification before God by faith in Jesus Christ. These are the two sides of truth emphasized by the Apostle Paul in Romans, and by James "the Lord's brother" in his intensely practical letter.

Let us see just what kind of habits, or behavior should characterize the man in Christ; with what beautiful garments he should be arrayed. First of all we read, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies." The elect of God are those whom He has foreknown from all eternity and who are manifest in time as believers in His Son. "Holy and beloved" is what they are as before God. They have been set apart in Christ; sanctified by the blood of the everlasting covenant, they are dear to God because they are His own children, partakers of the divine nature. How unseemly if such are ever found stern and unfeeling toward others, recipients as they are of such grace themselves. The ancients used the term "bowels" very much as we do the word "heart," to express the deepest feelings of humanity. We might read, "emotions of pity." While this may not be exactly a translation, it at least expresses in English the thought of the original. We are called upon to have hearts readily stirred to compassion and, like God Himself, delighting in mercy. Where it is otherwise we may well question whether one has been born of God. Harshness in dealing with failing brethren, on the basis of the necessity of maintaining righteousness, is anything but the spirit of Christ. Yearning love that would lead us to go to any possible length without contravening God's righteous

claims, should ever characterize us in our dealings one with another. "Be pitiful," writes another apostle, and how much we need to take such an exhortation to heart. The cruelest things have been done in the name of Him who is the incarnation of infinite mercy. How He has been misrepresented in His attitude toward sin and sinners by many who profess to be His followers.

The next word is in keeping with this: "kindness." It is quite impossible to maintain fellowship with God and not show the kindness of God toward others. There may indeed be a rigid, legal type of piety which leads one to imagine that he has been appointed of God to demonstrate His justice, but this is far from the godliness which is inculcated in the New Testament. Macaulay said of some of the sterner Puritans, "As one reads their writings he wonders if they had ever read a little volume called the New Testament." The loving-kindness of the Lord will be manifest in our kindness one to another. These two garments, emotions of pity and kindness are, we might say, inner vestments. The next one is a cap for the head, "humbleness of mind." Pride is of all things to God most hateful: "The proud He knoweth afar off." "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." The realization of one's own weakness and natural tendency to err will lead to low thoughts of self, and will make it easy to don

the vesture of meekness. This is composed of rarer material than is often supposed. Our Lord was adorned with it; He could say, "I am meek and lowly in heart." How beautiful He appeared as thus arrayed. And Moses had a garment of this excellent texture, lawgiver though he was, for we read, "The man Moses was very meek above all the men that were upon the face of the earth." But so rare is this grace that in the prophet Zephaniah, chapter 2, verse 3, we are told to "seek meekness," and this is after he has said, "Seek ye the Lord, ye meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgment." So delicate is this fabric that it might readily wear away in the stress and strain of the trials of this life. One needs therefore to be constantly in the presence of God seeking for this grace, which can be found nowhere else than in communion with Him. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," suggests the necessity of coming under His control if we would be adorned with meekness. The world will never understand the value of this lowly spirit. Our own lion-hearted Theodore Roosevelt said once, "I hate a meek man." He probably did not realize that the boldest man, the most utterly unafraid man ever seen on earth, our Lord Jesus Christ, was in the fullest sense a meek man. Meekness is not inconsistent with bravery, and enables one to suffer and be strong when

the world would "turn aside the way of the meek" (Amos 2:7).

Closely associated with meekness is the grace of "longsuffering," the readiness to endure grief suffering wrongfully. It is so natural for us when falsely accused to feel we must defend ourselves, or to resent such treatment; but of our blessed Lord we read that when false witnesses had risen up against Him He answered not a word, and when the adversary taunted King Hezekiah and his officers, charging them falsely and threatening severe treatment, the king's command to his people was, "Answer him not a word." God can be depended on to vindicate His own if they do not attempt to vindicate themselves, and so as they learn to commit their reputation, as well as all else that they once counted of value, to Christ Himself, they can patiently endure without resentment, praying for those who despitefully use them and who persecute them. In this they become consistent followers of the Man of Sorrows who could say, "They laid to My charge things I knew not."

We next read, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." This is in exact accord with Ephesians 4:32: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake [or, in Christ] hath forgiven you."

When teaching His disciples to pray our Lord told them to say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," and He added, "When you stand praying, forgive: for if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you." Some have thought the earlier passage is on lower ground than the later ones, but it does not seem necessary to put the one in any sense in opposition to the others. The forgiveness of which our Lord was speaking to His disciples was not the forgiveness of a sinner, but the forgiveness of a failing saint, one who could address God as "our Father," whereas the forgiveness spoken of here in Colossians and also in Ephesians is that of the sinner. Addressing His disciples our Lord says, as it were, "You are failing from day to day, you constantly need your Father's restorative and governmental forgiveness, and yet you cherish feelings of malice and enmity and an unforgiving spirit toward your brethren who offend you. If you do not forgive them you cannot expect your Father's forgiveness when you come to Him confessing your failures, and as long as this spirit of malice is cherished by you, you cannot really pray in faith." Here Paul takes it up in another way. He says, as it were, "Think how freely you have been forgiven; think how much God has cast behind His back. In the light of this how can you hold hard feelings or maintain an un-

forgiving spirit toward those who have sinned against you? If God had dealt with you according to your offences, how fearful would your judgment be, yet He in Christ has graciously forgiven all. He has put away every sin; thus making you fit for His holy presence. Your responsibility now is to forgive as you have been forgiven."

Some of you will remember the striking incident of the conversion of Macdonald Dubh, as narrated by Ralph Connor in "The Man from Glengarry." I understand the incident is not merely fiction, but is founded upon actual fact. The black Macdonald, a powerful, burly Highlander, living in Glengarry county, Ontario, had suffered untold anguish for years because of an injury inflicted upon him by a French Canadian some years before. He had nursed the desire to take a fearful vengeance upon his foe until it became a perfect obsession with him. Neither God nor eternity had any place in his life. It was in vain that the minister's wife tried to get him to forgive his enemy. She sought to have him repeat the Lord's Prayer, but he always balked at the words, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us." But God wrought in power in the Glengarry country, and there was a great revival, in which real Christians were aroused, and Christless men and women reached and saved. The black Macdonald

heard the story of the Cross told forth in living power in the Gaelic tongue, from the lips of the venerable Highland minister. It broke his heart and bowed him in penitence at the Saviour's feet. When next the minister's wife went to visit him and tried to stress the necessity of forgiveness, he sobbed out, as he joined with her in what is generally called the Lord's Prayer, *"Oh, it's a little thing, it's a little thing, for I have been forgiven so much!"* It is this that grips the heart and enables one to bear in patience the ill-doing and evil-speaking of others and preserves from bitterness of spirit or any desire for vengeance. How can one, forgiven so much, ever hold an unforgiving spirit against any?

And now turn to verse 14 where we have the girdle that holds all our new garments in place. It might be rendered, "And over all these things put on love, which is the girdle of perfection." Just as the Oriental binds his flowing robes about him with a girdle, or sash, so the new man binds his new habits with the controlling power of love. Whatever is contrary to love is contrary to Christ. No amount of sophistical reasoning can make anything pleasing to God which is opposed to that divine love which He Himself sheds abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us.

It would be well for some of us who are possessed with the idea that our great business on

earth is to carry out what has sometimes been called Pauline truth, to remember that Pauline truth does not center in 1 Corinthians 5, but rises to its highest, experimentally, in 1 Corinthians 13. We are not to neglect the one in order to fulfil the other; both are right and proper in their own places. In the portion we have been looking at we have had what should express our attitude toward our brethren in Christ and toward men of the world. Now in verse 15 we get that which is distinctly personal: "Let the peace of God," or, as some manuscripts read, "the peace of Christ"—the same peace that ever filled His breast when here on earth, the peace that is His on the throne of God in Heaven, where He sits far above all the storms of this lower scene—let that peace bear rule, or umpire, in your hearts. It is to this you are called in one Body. We are to seek the things that make for peace as members of that Body, and things whereby we may edify one another. But what is distinctly emphasized here is daily abiding in the blessedness of communion with our risen Lord, so that our hearts, like His own, may be kept in peace despite all we may be called upon to pass through, and thus we can fulfil the brief injunction, "Be ye thankful." Of the many sins of the unsaved not the least is unthankfulness. We are called upon to give thanks in every circumstance, "Giving thanks always for all things," knowing that nothing can ever enter into the life of the believer but what infinite love allows.

In the next two verses, which are very intimately linked with Ephesians 5:18-20, we read,

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly: in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another: in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hea ts to the Lord. And whatever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.

As punctuated in the Authorized Version the 16th verse does not bring out the three admonitions clearly and distinctly, but as given above each one stands out separately and in its place. First we are told to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. This is the only place in the New Testament where this particular expression, "the word of Christ," is found. It is most suggestive. The actual teaching of Christ, whether personally here on earth or by the Spirit since He has ascended to Heaven, is to dwell in full measure in each believer. Thus equipped and controlled by the truth we will be able to bless and help others—in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another. What we have is not given for ourselves alone. We are to be ready to communicate. Then, in the third place, as thus controlled by the Word of God, our lives will be lyrical and our hearts filled with melody, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. We read in Nehemiah, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Holiness and

happiness go together. Judah won a great victory when Jehoshaphat put the singers in the forefront of the army. Depend upon it, something is radically wrong with the Christian when he can no longer praise and rejoice.

Then, lastly, the entire life of the believer is summed up as subjection to the Lord. Whatever he does, whether in act or speech, all is to be in the name of the Lord Jesus, through whom he gives thanks to God, even the Father. There is no room whatever for self-will, for self-assertiveness here. As Christ in His humiliation could say, "I came not to do Mine own will but the will of Him that sent Me," so the Christian, the new man, is left on earth to represent Christ, to do the will of the Lord and not to please himself.

By comparing the Ephesian passage with this it will become evident that we have the same results from being filled with the Spirit there, and filled with the Word here. A Word-filled Christian is a Spirit-filled Christian; that is, a Christian who is so controlled by the Word of God that it dominates his entire life, and manifests that he is filled with the Holy Spirit. A careful consideration of these two passages might save from a great deal of fanaticism and misunderstanding in regard to the fullness of blessing which every truly converted soul cannot but crave.

LECTURE 14

THE EARTHLY RELATIONSHIPS OF THE NEW MAN

Colossians 3:18–4:1

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons.

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

In these verses the Holy Spirit, who, as we have seen, is Himself not mentioned in this Epistle, save incidentally in verse 8 of chapter 1, gives us instruction in regard to the sanctification of the natural, or earthly, relationships of the new man. It would be a great mistake to suppose, as some have done, that because we are members of the new creation we need no longer

consider ordinary human ties or responsibilities. While it is quite true that in the new creation there is neither male nor female, bond or free, but all are one in Christ Jesus, it is important to remember that our bodies belong to the old creation still, and it will not be until the redemption of the body at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him, that we shall be above the natural relationships in which we stand to one another as men and women here in the world. Even in the Church of God these human distinctions hold good, as we are reminded in the Epistles to the Corinthians and to Timothy and Titus. To say as some do that because there is neither male nor female in the new creation, we are to pay no attention to the divinely-given order pertaining to the respective places of man and woman in the Church of God on earth is not only to go beyond Scripture, but is positive disobedience to the Word of God. As long as we are subject to human limitations so long must we recognize our human responsibilities, and seek to maintain these in a scriptural way in order that we may commend the gospel of Christ. There is no condition in which the new life is more blessedly manifested than in circumstances sometimes hard for flesh and blood to endure, but where grace enables, brings triumph. A comparison of the instruction given in Colossians, in the verses quoted above, with

similar instruction in the Epistle to the Ephesians, will show us that the apostle deals very briefly here with what he has taken up at much greater length there, and the one Epistle should be compared with the other, and both with similar teaching given in 1 Peter, in order that we may get the mind of God as fully revealed in regard to the great and important principles which govern our behavior.

It will be noticed that in each of the Scriptures referred to the weaker is dealt with first, and then the stronger; or the one subject first, and then the one in authority: so here we have wives and husbands; then children and fathers; and lastly, servants and masters. Let us examine with some degree of care what the Holy Spirit says to each one.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." Where husband and wife are both Christians seeking to do the will of God, in whose hearts there is real mutual affection and esteem there will be no difficulty whatever in regard to such an admonition as this; but it will require true grace to yield loving obedience when perhaps the husband is a carnal, worldly, and unreasonable man, and yet we need to remember the marriage relationship is divinely ordained and as the old wedding ceremony puts it, "not to be lightly entered into," and according to the Word of God not easily to be termi-

nated. "For better, for worse, until death do us part," are words often flippantly uttered with no real conception of their seriousness. For the Christian woman this relationship once entered into, there is no other position in conformity with the will of God than that of godly submission to the husband whom she herself has chosen. The present loose ideas in regard to easy divorce are bearing fearful fruit which will increase unto more ungodliness as the end draws near, until there will be duplicated in Christendom the corruption and vileness of the days before the flood and the unspeakable immoralities of the cities of the plain. Of all this our blessed Lord has warned us most solemnly.

For one to seek to dissolve the marriage relationship because of incompatibility of temperament is to fly in the face of the Word of the living God. Death, or what is equivalent to it, the infidelity of husband or wife, is the only scriptural ground for termination of the marriage contract, leaving the other party free to remarry. It is true that 1 Corinthians 7:11 would imply that there may be circumstances in which no self-respecting woman could continue to live in this relationship, because of unspeakable cruelty, or abominable conditions which would be ruinous to soul and body alike, but if she departs she is to remain unmarried, and if conditions change she may be reconciled to her husband. But so long as she remains with

him she is responsible to recognize his headship as the one appointed by God to provide for the family, and even though conditions may sometimes be very distressing she is to seek to win her wayward spouse by manifesting the grace of Christ. "As it is fit in the Lord," suggests that gracious demeanor which ever characterized Him while He was in this scene, and also that her submission and obedience will never be such as to injure conscience or dishonor the Lord. In this she must act as before God, for after all, hers is the submission of a wife and not of a slave. It is loyalty to him who is her head that is enjoined.

In the 19th verse we read, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." And, right here, how many husbands fail! Imperiously demanding submission from the wife, how little do they show the love of Christ in their dealings with those thus dependent upon them! The Christian husband is to accept his place of headship as a sacred responsibility put upon him by God Himself, and is to exercise his authority for the blessing of his home in the love of Christ. And just as some wives may be united to tyrannical and unreasonable men, so there are husbands who, after marriage, find that one who in days of courtship seemed so docile and affectionate is a veritable termagant, and as unreasonable as it is possible to be. But still

the husband is to love and care for her, showing all consideration, "giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel," as Peter puts it, without indulging in wrath or anger. How much is involved in the exhortation, "Be not bitter against them." God knew how petty and trying some women's ways would be when He said to good men, "Be not bitter against them." In the power of the new life one may manifest patience and grace under the most trying circumstances.

Now we come to the injunction to children: "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." In childhood days parents stand in relation to their children as God Himself in relation to the parent. Children who do not obey their parents when young will not obey God when older. The natural heart is ever rebellious against authority, and perhaps never more strikingly has this been manifested than in these democratic days in which we live. But Christian children should be examples of godly submission to father and mother or whoever may be in authority over them, and parents are responsible to instill into their hearts the divine requirement of obedience. For young people professing piety, to ignore this principle of obedience is to manifest utter insubjection to the One they own as Lord.

But again we notice how carefully the Spirit of God guards all this when He says, "Fathers,

provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." Parental rule may be of such a character as to fill the growing boy or girl with indignation and contempt instead of drawing out the young heart in love and obedience. How easy it is, when come to manhood, to forget the feelings of a child, and so to implant in the hearts of the little ones resentment instead of tender affection. Surely this is contrary to every instinct of the new man. The Christian father is to imitate Him who is our Father-God.

It is when He addresses the servants that he goes into the greatest details. These, in the days when this Epistle was written, were slaves and not free men who served for wages, but if such instruction as we have here was applicable to bondmen, how much more does it apply to those who have the privilege of selling their services and of terminating engagements at will. There is no excuse whatever for surly, dishonest service, because perhaps the master or mistress may be exasperating and unappreciative. Notice the exhortation, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God." How this glorifies the servant's lowly path in whatever capacity he is called upon to labor for others. He is privileged to look at all his service as done unto the Lord Himself. Thus he labors faithfully, not only

under the master's eye, but when unseen by man; he carries on his appointed task conscientiously in singleness of heart, having the fear of God before his soul, according as it is written, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men: knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, because ye serve the Lord Christ." What a cheer was this to the Roman or Grecian slave, toiling on day after day with the most faithful ministrations taken perhaps but as a matter of course; yet if all were done as to the Lord one could be sure that in the coming day, the day of manifestation, He Himself would reward accordingly, accepting all the service as done unto Him.

On the other hand, if treated cruelly, and perhaps over-reached and cheated out of the due reward of his labor, the Christian servant does well to remember that God is taking note of all, and a day is coming when every wrong will be put right, and things that can never be settled here in righteousness will have a full settlement then, for, "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." Whether it be the servant who is unfaithful or the master who is unappreciative, the Lord Himself will bring everything to light at His judgment-seat, or in the case of the unsaved, at the Great White Throne, when every man shall be judged according to his works.

It is unfortunate that the chapter break comes just where it does. It would seem far more suitable to close chapter 3 with the next verse, and let chapter 4 begin with verse 2, for it is evident that verse 1 concludes this particular section. It is a message to those in authority: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." In every instance it is to the new man He speaks. Ungodly masters could not be expected to take heed to such an admonition as this, but it is addressed to one who, while master in his relationship to his servants, is himself but a servant to his own Master in Heaven. He may well give heed to what is here so impressively urged upon him. He is to treat his servants as he would have the Lord treat him. He is to be characterized by fairness, giving to those beneath him that which is just and equal, knowing that all the time his heavenly Master is looking on, and that when he comes to give account of his service, his relations to those who on earth served under him will all be carefully gone into, when everything will be brought to light.

What marvelous principles are these which we have seen so simply stated. Only one who knows something of the conditions prevailing in the Roman Empire at the time this letter was written can realize how revolutionary they were. In those days wives, children, and slaves had prac-

tically no standing before the law, except as husbands, fathers, or masters might desire to recognize them, but this glorious truth of the new man, this blessed unfolding of the new creation, tinged with glory every earthly relationship in which the Christian was found. It is like the blue border upon the hem of the pious Israelite's garment. Even on the lower edge where that long flowing robe came most nearly in contact with the earth, this ribbon of blue was seen; and blue, as we well know, is the heavenly color. The Israelite was to look upon it and remember that he had owned the Lord to be His God, He who had said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." As he looked upon the ribbon of blue he was to remember his responsibility to honor and to glorify the God of Heaven in his life on the earth, and we as Christians are to manifest the heavenly character in every lawful relationship which God has established during the present order of things for the blessing of mankind.

There is a story told of one of the Dauphins of France who had an English tutor. This teacher found his princely pupil very difficult to handle. Proud and haughty, and impatient of restraint, the young man submitted unwillingly to schoolroom restrictions and his foreign instructor was often at his wits' end how to deal with him. One morning as his pupil came to him the tutor placed upon the lapel of his jacket a purple rosette, say-

ing to him, "This is the royal color, and as you wear it I want you to remember that you are the Crown Prince of France, and that it is incumbent upon you ever to behave in a princely way. If you are wilful or disobedient I shall, of course, not attempt to punish you, as that is not in my province, but I shall simply point to the purple, and you will understand what I mean, that I do not feel your behavior is worthy of a princely lad." The appeal to the purple! How striking the suggestion, and may we not say that to us there is a similar appeal but, to use the Old Testament picture, it is the appeal to the blue! Wives, husbands, children, fathers, masters, and servants, are all alike called upon to manifest the holiness of Heaven, to display the heavenly character, even in earthly relationships.

It is in just such things as these that the power of the new life is wonderfully manifested. "Holding the Head" is not merely maintaining ecclesiastical truth, but it is shown forth in a holy godly life—in subjection of heart and mind to Christ, and never more fully than in the way we live in the family, and in connection with business and social responsibilities.

LECTURE 15

CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS

Colossians 4:2-6

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

One of the most common sins among Christians to-day is that of prayerlessness. No doubt this has been true throughout the centuries. And yet we are again and again not only exhorted, but distinctly commanded to pray.

"Men ought always to pray and not to faint."

"Pray without ceasing."

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."

"Praying in the Holy Ghost."

To these might be added many similar expressions, reminding us that prayer is in very truth "the Christian's vital breath." It is the life of the new man. One can no more have a happy, triumphant Christian experience who neglects this

spiritual exercise than one can be well and strong physically who shuts himself up in a close room to which the sun never penetrates and where pure air is unknown. The soul flourishes in an atmosphere of prayer.

And yet the Christian has sometimes been asked, Why do we need to pray? If God is infinitely wise and infinitely good, as the Holy Scriptures declare Him to be, why need any of His creatures petition Him regarding anything which they conceive to be either for their own good or for the blessing of others? Is it not a higher and purer faith that leads one to ignore these exercises altogether and simply to trust Him to do what He sees to be best in every circumstance? Those who reason thus manifest but little acquaintance with the Word of God, and little realize the needs of the soul.

Prayer is, first of all, communion with God. Our blessed Lord Himself, in the days of His flesh, is seen again and again leaving the company of His disciples and going out into some desert place on a mountain side, or into a garden, that His spirit might be refreshed as He bowed in prayer alone with the Father. From such reasons of fellowship He returned to do His mightiest works and to bear witness to the truth. And in this He is our great Exemplar. We need to pray as much as we need to breathe. Our souls will languish without it, and our testimony will be utterly fruit-

less if we neglect it. We are told to continue in prayer. This does not mean that we are to be constantly teasing God in order that we may obtain what we might think would add most to our happiness or be best for us, but we are to abide in a sense of His presence and of our dependence upon His bounty. We are to learn to talk to Him and to quietly wait before Him, too, in order that we may hear His voice as He speaks to us. We are bidden to bring everything to Him in prayer, assured that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us. But because we are so ignorant and so shortsighted we need ever to remember that we are to leave the final disposal of things with Him who makes no mistakes. Without anxiety as to anything, we may bring everything to Him in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, making known our requests in childlike simplicity; then, leaving all in His hands, we go forth in fullest confidence as our hearts say, "Thy will be done," knowing that He will do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

We need to be often reminded that we cannot pray as we should unless we are careful as to our walk before God, and so we are told not only to continue in prayer but to watch in the same, and that with thanksgiving. "Watch and pray." Here are two things which must never be separated. It is so easy to slip into a careless condition of

soul, to become entangled amid worldly and unholy snares, so that we lose all spiritual discernment and our prayers become selfish; and when this is the case it is vain to think that we shall obtain anything from the Lord. But where there is watchfulness and sobriety, with honest confession and self-judgment when we realize failure has come in, we can pray in fullest confidence, knowing that all hindrance is removed. Here, as in Philippians 4, we are reminded that thanksgiving for past mercies should accompany prayer for present and future blessing. To receive God's good gifts as a mere matter of course soon dries up spiritual affection, and we become self-centered instead of Christ-centered, and foolishly imagine that God is in some way bound to lavish His mercies upon us whether we are grateful or not. In our dealings with one another we feel it keenly if ingratitude is manifested and kindness goes unacknowledged. Even though we may give unselfishly we like appreciation, and a hearty "thank you" makes one all the more ready to minister again where there is need. And we may be assured that our God finds joy in His people's praises. He loves to give, but He delights in our appreciation of His benefits.

Paul, unquestionably the greatest preacher and teacher that the Christian dispensation has known, was not above requesting the prayers of the people of God. He felt his need of their

prayer-help, and so he says, "Withal praying also for us that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds; that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak." He did not feel that because he was in prison his work was over. Although unable to face the multitudes in public places as in past years, he was ever on the lookout for opportunities of service, and he would have the saints join with him in prayer that even in his prison cell a door of utterance might be open to him. How natural it would have been for him to give up in despair and settle down in utter discouragement, or simply to endure passively the long, weary months of imprisonment, taking it for granted that nothing could really be accomplished for God so far as gospel fruit was concerned until he should be free. But he was of another mind entirely. His circumstances did not indicate that God had forsaken him nor that He had set him to one side. He was eagerly looking for fresh opportunities to advance upon the enemy.

We are told that just before the first battle of the Marne in the World War of 1914–18, Marshal Foch, the great French General, reported: "My center is giving; my left wing is retreating; the situation is excellent; I am attacking." This was not mere military bombast, for the Marshal realized that apparent defeat could be

turned into victory by acting with resolution and alacrity at the very moment when the enemy seemed to be triumphant. Doubtless the devil thought he had gained a great advantage when he shut Paul up in prison, but from that prison cell came at least four of the great Church Epistles, and some of the pastoral letters, which have been the means of untold blessing to millions throughout the centuries. And from that cell, too, the gospel went out; first to the prison-guards, and through them to many more in Caesar's palace who might not otherwise have been reached. How important it is not to give ground to Satan, but in prayer and faith to turn every defeat into a victory by seizing the opportunity and advancing against the foe, assured that our great Captain knows no retreat.

Alas, we spend so much time halting between two opinions, debating what we should do, and doing nothing. We need the grace of decision that will enable us to seize the opportune moment and act upon it in the fear of God. And this is emphasized in the verse that follows: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." In our intercourse with men of the world how we need to remember that opportunities, to warn of judgment to come and to point them to Christ, once given may never come again. Therefore the tremendous importance of buying up such privileges of service in the light of the judgment-seat of Christ.

The day of grace is fast passing away. We meet men once, perhaps, never to see them again, and while it is perfectly true that we cannot be forever pestering people about what they would call our religious notions, yet it is the part of wisdom to be on the lookout for every opening that will give us the privilege to minister Christ to their souls.

To each man's life there comes a time supreme,
One day, one night, one morning, or one noon,
One freighted hour, one moment opportune,
One rift through which sublime fulfilments gleam,
One space when faith goes tiding with the stream,
One *Once* in balance 'twixt Too Late, Too Soon,
And ready for the passing instant's boon
To tip in favor of uncertain beam.

Ah, happy he who, knowing how to wait,
Knows, also how to watch, and work, and stand,
On Life's broad deck alert, and at the prow
To seize the passing moment, big with fate,
From Opportunity's extended hand,
When the great clock of Destiny strikes *now!*

But if we would witness to the Lord in such a way that our testimony will really count we must be careful that our walk agrees with our speech. Careless behavior when in the company of worldlings will only make them feel that we do not ourselves believe the tremendous truths which we would press upon them. How careful preachers need to be in regard to this! The world is so quick to judge, and will only turn away with

disgust from a man who is serious on the platform but frivolous among men. He who is solemn as he preaches of divine realities but is a giggling buffoon when out in company, need not think that he will make any permanent impression for good upon the hearts and consciences of those among whom he mingles. Many a servant of Christ in his anxiety to be accepted of men and to become what is called to-day "a good mixer," sincerely hoping thereby to commend his message, has found to his sorrow that he has paid too high a price for his popularity; he has but cheapened himself and his ministry by coming down to the level of natural men who know not the power of the new life.

I remember well a friend speaking once of two preachers. One was perhaps a bit unduly serious, not that anyone can be soo sober as he faces the realities of eternity, but the man in question was perhaps a bit too stern to readily make friends among those whom he wished to help. The other was the very soul of cordiality. He would tell a good story, smoke a good cigar, and make himself hail-fellow-well-met with all and sundry with whom he came in contact. Speaking of him my friend said, "Dr. Blank is a fine fellow. I do enjoy an hour in his company; he makes me forget all my troubles, but," he added thoughtfully, "if I were dying I'd rather have Mr. So-and-So come and pray with me." Ah, my brethren, let us not forfeit our high and holy

calling as Christ's representatives in order that we may obtain popularity among men who have little relish for divine things. This does not mean that we are called upon to be disagreeable in our behavior or conversation, for we are told, "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Gracious speech flows from a heart established in the grace of God. Of Jesus the psalmist wrote, "Grace is poured into Thy lips." He could say, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." But this did not make Him indifferent to evil, nor unfaithful in dealing with those who needed rebuke. "Seasoned with salt" suggests the preservative power of faithfulness. There is always a danger that a gracious man will become a weak man, and will lack courage to speak out faithfully when occasion demands it. In the law it is written, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor; thou shalt not suffer sin upon him." We are all our brothers' keepers to a certain extent, and while nothing is more contrary to the spirit of Christ than an overweening, captious, fault-finding spirit, yet where Christ's honor is at stake, or where we realize a brother is standing in dangerous places, we need the salt of righteousness to season gracious speech in order that we may know how to speak to every man. And if we would perfect ourselves in this grace we need to live more in company with the Lord Jesus

Christ Himself. Follow Him through the Gospels in His wondrous ministry of grace and truth here on earth. See how marvelously He met each individual case. F. W. Grant has well said, "Our Lord had no stereotyped method of dealing with souls." He took up each case on its merits. He did not talk to the woman at the well in the same way as He addressed Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews. He probed the depths of each heart and ministered according to the need.

And His devoted follower, the Apostle Paul, the author of this divinely inspired letter to the Colossians, was ever exercised in regard to the same thing. He was made all things to all men if by any means he might save some. In the Jewish synagogue he reasoned out the Scriptures like the most able rabbi or doctor of the law. When he stood on Mars Hill among the Athenian philosophers he was a master of rhetoric and showed full acquaintance with Greek thought and literature, but spake not as pleasing men, but God who trieth the hearts, until his great address was interrupted by the excited throng about him, who spurned the idea of the resurrection of the body. Addressing the idolaters of Lycaonia he met them on their own ground, and appealed from nature to nature's God, seeking to turn them from their vanities and draw their hearts to the Creator of all things. How different in all this was both the Master and the servant to many who to-day

seem to pride themselves on their outspokenness and indifference to the views and opinions of others. Is it any wonder that men turn from them in disgust and refuse to listen to what seems to them but the dogmatic utterances of self-centered egotists. On the other hand, as intimated above, there are those who seek to be gracious but who utterly lack faithfulness, and who would gloss over any doctrine or evil in the lives of their hearers rather than run the risk of giving offence. How much divine wisdom is needed, and how close must the servant keep to the Master Himself, in order that he may know how to answer every man.

LECTURE 16

CLOSING SALUTATIONS

Colossians 4:7-18

All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here. Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him); and Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God which have been a comfort unto me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it. The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.

This last section, though somewhat lengthy, does not require very much in the way of either

exposition or explanation. It is interesting, however, to compare the references to the same persons mentioned here with those in other Epistles.

We do not know much about Tychicus, mentioned in verse 7, exceptin that in Ephesians 6: 21-22 he is again spoken of in almost the same terms. It is evident that he was one in whom the apostle had implicit confidence. He speaks of him in each passage as a beloved brother and faithful minister, adding here a third expression —"fellow-servant in the Lord." Beloved and yet faithful! What a rare but blessed combination is this! So often men who seek to be faithful become almost unconsciously stern and ungracious, thereby forfeiting the tender affection of the people of God, even though they may be looked upon with respect as men of principle who can be depended upon to do and say the righteous thing at all cost to themselves or others; and unhappily, in the last instance, they may manifest very little real concern for the peace of mind or comfort of heart of those who disagree with them. On the other hand, many a beloved brother purchases the affectionate regard of the saints at the cost of faithfulness to truth. It is far better to be true to Christ and His Word, and thus have His approval, than to be approved of men and loved because of weakness in enforcing what is according to truth.

Tychicus evidently went to neither extreme. He was undoubtedly a lovable man because of his gracious demeanor and his tender solicitude for the welfare of the saints, but at the same time he was faithful in ministering the Word of God, rebuking iniquity and also comforting the penitent. Such men are rarer than we realize. In them we see the delightful combination of the shepherd's heart and the prophet's spirit. One cannot but think how alike in character were Timothy and Tychicus. Both were loyal to the Word of God, and both sought the comfort and blessing of the people of God.

In verse 9 Onesimus is spoken of in similar terms. He is called a "faithful and beloved brother." It is evident that he did not have the gift that marked Tychicus, but the two characteristics we have noticed were manifest in him. We know much more of his history than of several others mentioned in this chapter. The brief letter to Philemon tells us a great deal regarding him. He had been a dishonest runaway slave: he had robbed his master and apparently wasted his ill-gotten gains, ere he was brought to Christ through coming in contact with Paul in Rome. Philemon himself had been converted through the same devoted servant, so we may see, in mercy being extended to the thieving slave, a wondrous picture of sovereign grace.

Sov'reign grace o'er sin abounding;
Ransomed souls the tidings swell!
'Tis a deep that knows no sounding;
Who its length and breadth can tell?
On its glories
Let my soul forever dwell.

After Onesimus was brought to Christ, Paul sent him back to his master, offering himself to become his surety in the tender words, "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee or oweth thee aught, put that to my account; I, Paul, have written it with mine own hand. I will repay it." What a gospel picture is this! It is Christ Himself who has assumed the responsibilities of the penitent sinner. "We are all God's Onesimuses," said Luther. Christ paid our debt that we might be accepted in Him before God.

He bore on the tree, the sentence for me,
And now both the Surety and sinner are free.

And when thus redeemed, it is our happy privilege to serve Him in glorious liberty and say with the psalmist, "Truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds."

Of Aristarchus, whom Paul here calls his fellow-prisoner, we read in Acts 19 that he was a Macedonian traveling with Paul, and endangered his very life on behalf of the gospel at the time of the uproar in Ephesus. He is also mentioned

again in Philemon 24 as a fellow-laborer with the apostle. His name would imply that he was of the so-called upper classes, an aristocrat of Macedonia, who for the sake of the kingdom of God had renounced his place of prominence in the world to become a bondman of Jesus Christ.

We are glad to see the affectionate way in which Paul here writes of Marcus, the nephew of Barnabas. Years before, this young man had been the cause of serious contention between these two devoted men of God. Paul had lost confidence in John Mark because of his leaving the work and returning to his mother in Jerusalem, upon the completion of the evangelistic tour in Cyprus. Barnabas, kindly in spirit and evidently moved by natural affection, wanted to give the unfaithful helper a second chance, but Paul was obdurate. He felt he could not afford to jeopardize the success of their work by again taking with them one who had proved himself a weakling. Which one really had the mind of God, we are not told; but we are thankful indeed to find that Mark "made good" as we say, and became a trusted and honored man of God; companion to Peter (see 1 Peter 5:13), and dear to Paul as well as to his uncle, Barnabas. He is again mentioned in Philemon 24 as a fellow-laborer, and Paul requests Timothy to bring Mark with him, in 2 Timothy 4:11. The fact that he

needed the spiritual commendation of this 10th verse would seem to imply that at the time of writing there were some who still stood in doubt of him, but the apostle's recommendation would remove all that.

The next name, "Jesus, which is called Justus," might well remind us of the humiliation to which our blessed Lord stooped in grace when He became a man in order to give His life for sinners. To us there is only one "Jesus." That name is now above every name, and shines resplendent in highest glory; unique and precious; a name with which none other can ever be compared. But we need to be reminded that "Jesus" represents the Hebrew name "Joshua" and was in common use when our Lord was here on earth. And so we have here a brother otherwise unknown bearing the same name as his Saviour, and not only that but surnamed The Just. This latter title was given to men because of their recognized integrity, as in the case of Joseph Barsabas of Acts 1:23, and an otherwise unknown Justus in Acts 18:7.

There is something peculiarly suggestive in the way the apostle eulogizes these brethren whose salutations he thus conveys to the Colossians. "These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God which have been a comfort unto me." It is evident that then, as now, gift and grace did not necessarily go together. There were others

who were perhaps energetic enough in service but who were anything but brotherly in their attitude toward Paul.

Of Epaphras we have already had the apostle's estimate in Colossians 1:7. Here he draws special attention to this man's fervency in prayer. It was he who had come from Colosse to visit Paul and to acquaint him with the conditions that called forth this letter. That he had some ability as a preacher and teacher we know, for it was through his ministry these Colossians had been won to Christ and the assembly formed there; but his greatest ministry was evidently one of prayer. In that he labored fervently, striving earnestly in supplication before God, so deeply concerned was he for the saints that they might enter into the truth in all its fulness and thus in practical experience stand as full-grown and filled full, or complete, in all the will of God. In this prayer Paul joined, as we have seen in Colossians 1:9. This earnest apostle of prayer, Epaphras, had not confined his ministry or interest to Colosse, but he bore in his heart, in the same intense zeal, the neighboring assemblies of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

It is most pathetic to compare verse 14 with 2 Timothy 4:10-11. Here we read, "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you." But in writing to Timothy the apostle says, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,

and hath departed unto Thessalonica..Only Luke is with me." From the day he joined Paul's company (as intimated in Acts 16 where the change of the pronoun from "they" to "us" showed that Luke formed one of the party at Troas, Acts 16: 8-9), "Luke, the beloved physician," was one of Paul's most devoted helpers. He remained with him to the end, and possibly saw him martyred.

Demas and Luke seem to have been intimately associated, for both here and in Philemon 24 the two names are found together, but upon the occasion of Paul's second imprisonment we learn that the love of the world had been too much for Demas. He found the itinerant preacher's lot too hard, and he left the apostle in his hour of need and went off to Thessalonica. There is no hint that he plunged into a life of sin. He may have gone into some respectable business; but the Holy Ghost relentlessly exposes the hidden springs of his changed behavior. He loved this present world. No longer are he and Luke joined in devoted service. Demas had chosen an easier path.

Salutations are sent to the Laodicean brethren; and Nymphas, who was evidently prominent among them and in whose house they met for worship, is especially mentioned. We may gather from verse 16 how the apostolic letters were early circulated among the churches. This Colossian Epistle was not only to be read locally but

was to be read also in the assembly of the Laodiceans. And a letter sent to the latter church was to be sent on to Colosse. This Epistle from Laodicea (observe not *to* Laodicea) is probably our Epistle to the Ephesians, and is generally regarded as a circular letter that went first to Ephesus and then to other churches in the Roman proconsular province of Asia, thus reaching Colosse from Laodicea. We have already seen how important it is to study the two together as they are divinely linked in such a wonderful way.

In verse 17 Paul gives a special admonition to Archippus, also mentioned in the letter to Philemon, who was apparently a servant of Christ ministering the Word at Colosse, but had a tendency not uncommon in some young preachers to settle down comfortably and take things easily. To him the apostle sends the message, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord that thou fulfil it.'. Promptness and energy are as important in spiritual service as in anything else. There is an incident related in connection with two leading generals of the Southern Confederacy of America that might well speak to every servant of Christ. General Robt. E. Lee once sent word to General Stonewall Jackson that he would be glad to talk with him at his convenience on some matter of no great urgency. General Jackson instantly rode to headquarters,

through most inclement weather. When General Lee expressed surprise at seeing him, Jackson exclaimed, "General Lee's slightest wish is a supreme command to me, and I always take pleasure in prompt obedience." It is to be hoped that this same spirit laid hold of Archippus, and that he profited by the prodding of the aged apostle.

The Epistle was signed in accordance with Paul's usual custom with his own hand. According to the note at the end Tychicus and Onesimus acted as his amanuenses in producing this letter but he appended his signature. How much would one give to have an autographed copy of this or any other of his letters! He would have them remember his bonds both as stirring them up to prayer and to remind them that the servant's path is one of suffering and rejection.

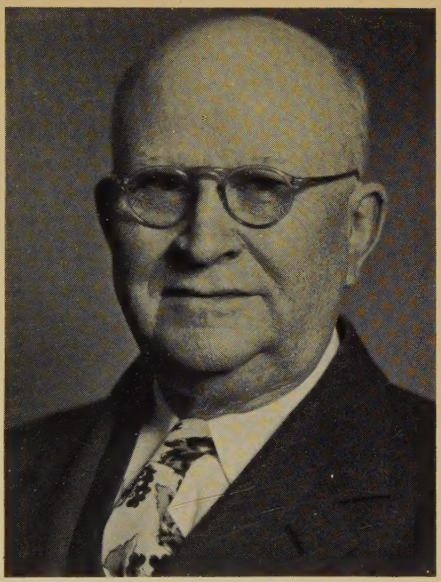
He closes with the customary benediction, "Grace be with you. Amen." This is not so full as that in the last verse of 2 Thessalonians, which he tells us is the token of genuineness in every Epistle of his, but as we go over all the thirteen letters that bear his name and the anonymous letter to the Hebrews we see that in every one there is some message about grace at the end. He was preeminently the apostle of grace, and it is no matter of surprise that this precious word should be his secret mark, as it were, thus authenticating every letter. May that grace

abound in us as it already has abounded toward us through the abundant mercy of our God.

> Grace is the sweetest sound
> That ever reached our ears,
> When conscience charged and Justice frowned,
> 'Twas grace removed our fears!

We began with grace, we are kept by grace, and it is grace that will bring us home at last.

About the Author . . .



H. A. IRONSIDE, internationally beloved Bible teacher and preacher, was author of more than 60 volumes as well as many pamphlets and articles on Bible subjects. His writings include addresses or commentaries on the entire New Testament, all of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, and a great many volumes on specific Bible themes and subjects.

Countless thousands of readers testify to Dr. Ironside's helpful faculty of getting to the heart of any Scripture, and his clear, easily grasped outlines of even the most complex passages make the Bible easier to study and to understand. He wrote as simply and as directly as he spoke—no one who has heard him preach will forget how vividly he made Bible texts come to life and linger in the memory and in the heart.

For 18 of his 50 years of ministry, Dr. Ironside was pastor of the famous Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. In October 1948 he resigned to devote himself to further writing and conference speaking. He went to be with the Lord on January 15, 1951.

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